


**THE GREATER
MISCHIEF**

Margaret Westrup



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THE GREATER MISCHIEF

A Novel

BY
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"THE COMING OF BILLY"



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THE GREATER MISCHIEF

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THE GREATER MISCHIEF

CHAPTER I

AUDREY worked at her hem.

The light of the lamp flickered about the quiet little figure, and filled the rest of the long room with ghostly, moving shadows. Audrey's brown head was bent low over her work; slowly, with laborious care, she put in the crooked stitches on the piece of coarse linen that when finished was destined to be a pudding-cloth.

She sat at the table, and only her small shoulders and head appeared above it. In front of her there was a cheap little yellow wooden work-box; it contained reels of white and black cotton, pins, needles, and scissors, all arranged with an exemplary tidiness. The same scrupulous neatness was apparent in the arrangement of the old-fashioned frock, pinafore, stockings, hair.

Alone in the parlor Audrey sat and worked at her hem. It was a rough night, and the storm outside was increasing. The little square gray house topped a hill: for many years it had stood, lonely and sad, defying storms with a sturdy front.

To-night the wind howled around it; gusts made their way in at ill-fitting windows; the lamplight flickered more

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

wildly, now shining full on the child's down-bent head, now leaving her in shadow. She worked on steadily, never raising her eyes from her sewing. When the light lit her face it showed it pale, strenuous, the small lips folded with an odd firmness; the delicate brows drawn together till two little upright lines were dented into her forehead.

She came to the end of her cotton; she took a reel from her work-box, cut a length, and tried to thread her needle. Always a task beset with difficulty, it was rendered more difficult than usual now by the flickering light. A good deal of time was lost; the dented lines on her brow grew deeper; her hot little fingers shook with nervous excitement, and the needle slipped from her hand to the floor. She got off her chair slowly, and as she did so her eyes leaped swiftly, irresistibly, to the dark corner by the cupboard. She had known that the Bogey was there, watching her, all the time. It was always there on stormy nights, lurking behind the cupboard. There were other Bogeys too about the house when the wind blew high.

She believed her mother too knew that they were there, because her mother was always different, always sort of queer when there was a storm blowing outside.

But then her mother was so brave—she would never be frightened at anything. She wasn't frightened at the things that crept about the house when the wind blew; she was angry with them, Audrey supposed, that was why she was sort of queer. . . .

Well, she would be brave, too. She stooped and began to grope for the needle, but—suppose the Bogey were to creep out and pounce on her back? She rose, and stood staring into the dark corner.

There was no sound of life about the little old gray

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

house. Audrey, a small atom in the wild night, seemed alone. She fell on her knees and pressed her face down onto the hard horsehair seat of the chair.

With the creaks and rattlings of the house beneath the onslaughts of the wind, the fitful pattering of rain on the window-panes, her voice, halting, strenuous, scarcely more than an earnest gasp, rose in a minor chant:

*"Have mercy, Lord; Thy suppliant save,
And heal the wounds Thy justice gave;
Nor bid Thy fearful judgments roll
In angry billows o'er my soul."*

*"My trembling heart bemoans its sin,
And feels the bitter pangs within;
O God, my help, in pity save;
For who shall thank Thee in the grave?"*

*"How long the weary night appears!
My couch is water'd with my tears;
Revil'd by those who fear not Thee,
My strength resumes with misery."*

The shaky voice ceased.

"It daren't come near me while I'm *praying*," she told herself; but there was no confidence in the despairing assurance.

There had been a lull outside. Now the wind flung itself against the walls of the house in a sudden furious onslaught; it made its way, in the shape of a sharp little gust, into the room where Audrey knelt, and hit her coldly in the nape of her neck.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She knew that the Bogey had come right out of the corner at last. . . . She knelt there, stiff and rigid, her eyes hidden in her hands, her hands pressing into the chair till they were sore and red with the pressure. Then slowly she became aware of the smell of a blown-out lamp, and, involuntarily, she lifted her head.

The lamp had gone out and the room was in darkness.

She rose stiffly to her feet, and felt her way to the open door. In the hall a hurricane of draughts met her—played about her short skirt—her legs—her hair. A lamp burned dimly, making more ghostly shadows. She wanted to run, but dared not; her legs moved in slow, stiff jerks. She went up the shallow stairs and paused outside a door: it was the door of her mother's bedroom. She knew that her mother would be in there: she always went there when a storm came on. But Audrey was not allowed to enter that room without first knocking, and she was afraid if she were to knock now that she would be forbidden to enter. The need for the presence of some other human being was so insistent that it made her usual obedience falter, die: she turned the handle softly and opened the door.

The room was lit only by one candle; it stood on the table. A little way from it, her spare little figure now lit by its light, now in shadow, Susan Fielding stood staring out into the night. Every now and then the light leaped up and shone on her face. It was a small, rugged face, oddly lined and seamed, like a very old and withered apple. Her mouth was thin and obstinate; it rarely relaxed into a smile, though sometimes there was a touch of somewhat sardonic humor in its lines. In a network of wrinkles that seemed to proclaim a weary struggle with life, a pair of dark eyes were set deep, and they bore, in some subtle way, an

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

air of incongruity to the rest of the face. They were doggy little eyes, bright and intelligent and sad, like a fox-terrier's. Her dark hair was streaked with gray, and she wore it dragged back uncompromisingly from her brow, and wound tightly at the back of her head. She dressed always in dingy colors, with an obvious disregard of anything but neatness and comfort. But with it, perhaps because all her life she had loved a scrupulous cleanliness and much open air, there was a certain freshness about her, just as there is something fresh about a little old apple, however withered.

A gust of wind that set the windows rattling afresh had deadened the sound of the opening door. Audrey stood just within the room, her eyes on her mother.

Susan stirred, looked round.

"Come here!" she said.

The child drew near nervously.

Susan put her hands upon her shoulders, and pulled her into the light of the candle. She stood staring down into the childish face upraised to hers. Audrey stood quite still, wondering, looking.

The rain pattered on the window; the light flickered; Susan gazed as if she would see into the child's very soul. Her face was so sorely troubled that Audrey ventured at last a little:

"It isn't so windy now, Mother."

Susan's hands relaxed on her shoulders; she pushed her away gently.

"Why did you come in without knocking, Audrey? Did you forget?"

There was a pause; then, "No," said Audrey, in a small voice.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Then why did you do it?" Susan's voice was cold.

The pause lasted longer this time.

"I—I was afraid you—you wouldn't let me in if I knocked, Mother," she said, truthfully.

Into Susan's eyes there flashed a gleam of triumph; but her voice was inexorable as she replied:

"You should not have done it. You are a coward, Audrey. Go down and finish your hem."

Audrey turned and went slowly down the stairs, terror in her face. Susan stood and watched her, then went back into the room behind her.

As Audrey reached the narrow little hall, a step—a nervous, hurried step—echoed in the passage that led to a door opening on to the garden, and a little cry broke from the child.

"Amelia! Oh, you've come back, Amelia!"

The dumpy little brown figure just emerged into the hall stopped.

"Yes, and wet through! And such a night!"

Audrey flung strenuous arms about her.

"Oh, Amelia, I do think you're so very beautiful!"

The light shone down upon a long, hatchetlike face, with light little eyes, and a loose mouth; upon a ludicrous little row of brown curls, so tight and trim that even the storm had been powerless to dislodge them from their proud position at the summit of a very high and very shiny brow. For the rest, Amelia's hair was dressed with an exemplary tidiness, being dragged into a tight knot behind the curls. Amelia was little, and thin in the places where she should have been stout, and stout where she should have been thin.

"Oh, dearie!" A little bashful smile stretched her

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

mouth. "There, let me go! I'm drenched through, and me so nervous in a storm!"

"Will you just light the lamp in there for me, Amelia, *dear* Amelia?"

"Where? Oh yes, very well."

She ran with a funny little side-way motion into the room and lit the lamp.

"Now you get along with your sewing, dearie. I must go and get off my wet things, or I'll be going and catching a cold on my chest. I always was so delicate."

She trotted, flat-footed, from the room.

Audrey, her face determined, resumed her sewing. She kept her eyes fixed resolutely on her hem, but in her hurry she grew hot, her nervous hands became sticky, her stitches black. She slipped from her chair and ran through the hall into the kitchen. In the doorway she paused, surprised.

Amelia stood on the table, her neck up-stretched towards the ceiling.

"Amelia," she said, "what are you doing?"

"Lord save us!" screamed Amelia.

She scrambled from the table, clapping her hand dramatically to her right side. (Amelia was left-handed.)

"You mustn't say that," Audrey said, with a scared glance over her shoulder, "it's taking the name of the Lord in vain. What were you doing, Amelia?"

Amelia's husky voice shrilled into sudden anger.

"Who are you, I'd like to know, to come and spy on me? I won't have it! I've done nothing wrong—no, I haven't! You're the last one who ought to be against me, if all they say is true—" She paused for breath, and Audrey's quiet little voice put in with a certain staid persistence:

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Why were you standing on the table, Amelia?"

Amelia was brought up short: it had happened often before. Beneath Audrey's shy timidity there was a strain of determination that triumphed over Amelia's weaker nature.

"I always was delicate," she answered now, with a certain mechanicalness, born of much use of the phrase. "There are times when I must stand on a chair or table," she added, hastily, "it's the only position that gives me any ease. I'd have fainted most likely, just now, if I hadn't got onto the table."

"Oh, would you, Amelia? I wish I'd seen you!"

A movement in the room overhead brought back remembrance of the half-finished hem.

"I want a jam-pot, please," she added, her voice grown anxious.

Clasping an empty stone jar to her bosom, she ran back to the dining-room; she set it down on the table before her, and at intervals ceased working to lay hot, desperate little hands against its cold surface. In her mind there was a poignant memory of a night not long since, when she had had to sit up to finish a punishment hem till twelve o'clock. And her mother and Amelia had gone to bed as usual at ten.

And black stitches had to be unpicked. Her clasp of the jam-pot grew frantic.

After awhile Susan Fielding came into the room.

"Have you finished your hem, Audrey?"

"Not quite, Mother."

"Let me look."

There was silence while the work was examined.

"It is bad. You are seven years old." She paused.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Audrey's hot cheeks testified to the fact that she understood the analogy between the two sentences. "It is your bedtime, but, for your disobedience this evening, you must finish this hem to-night." She picked up a pin; then she paused, her hand half-way to the hem, her eyes on the child's upraised face, which was full of a shrinking dread.

In the kitchen Amelia dropped something with a clatter. Susan shut her lips tight, and with ruthless hand dug the pin into the hem half-way up the part already worked. "That," she said, "must all be unpicked."

Audrey took back the linen and picked up her scissors.

"Perhaps—" Susan began, then changed her sentence. "You are an idle little girl, Audrey. You are not fond of work."

Audrey, painfully digging the scissors into the tight little stitches, did not answer.

"Are you?"

"No, Mother." There was shame in the low voice at the awful admission.

"I was!" The words burst from Susan with startling feeling. "At your age I could work as neatly as I can now! And I loved it! I loved it!"

Hot tears splashed down onto the linen.

"P—p'raps I will s-soon, Mother," Audrey quavered, strong doubt struggling with hope within her.

"Love it or hate it, you've got to do it!" her mother said, harshly.

She sat down at the table and drew a large volume of sermons towards her. The old grandfather's clock out in the hall ticked noisily. Susan Fielding, upright in her chair, read assiduously.

Audrey's unpicking was a long and painful task. At a

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

quarter to ten, prayer-time, she had just finished the last stitch. She glanced despairingly at the long row of little brown holes, testification of arduous and wasted work.

Amelia came in, and they knelt down. Susan read out a long prayer. Audrey tried, with a terrified consciousness of her own wickedness, to think of God, but she was thinking only of the Bogey in the corner; she was living through, in acute anticipation, the time when she alone would be awake in the house, sitting down there, working for hours and hours and hours. . . .

"Audrey, what did I pray for last?"

"I—I—for—for—"

In the prayer that followed, craving the Almighty for mercy, humbly begging that Audrey's frivolous spirit might be led into the straight and narrow path, passionate feeling shook Susan's voice. Vaguely Audrey understood that she was indeed a miserable sinner.

After prayers the hem had to undergo another examination.

"Only just unpicked! How slow you are, Audrey. Don't forget to put out the lamp when you go to bed. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mother."

Amelia lingered, putting away the prayer and sermon books.

"Amelia!"

"Yes, dearie?"

"Oh, Amelia, dear, *dear* Amelia, don't go to bed just yet!"

Amelia stood, her face puckered up in worry. The row of curls quivered agitatedly.

"I daren't stay up," she said.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I will pray for your soul every day and night, Amelia! You'll very likely go to heaven for it! Oh, Amelia, *do!*"

"You know she'd never hear of it, dearie! She'd be dreadfully cross, though I *am* a relation, even if it's only a poor one! But you get along with your work—I'll dawdle putting the room in order."

Audrey seized the linen, and set to work with feverish haste. Amelia bustled about aimlessly, doing nothing with elaborate care. In a little while the door was pushed open and Susan came in. She had not begun to undress. In the light of the candle she held in her hand her face looked grim; she turned her dark eyes with a peculiar glare upon Amelia.

"Go to bed!" she said.

She closed her lips on the words as if she were shutting back more.

Amelia began to make excuses.

"I was clearing up! You always hate a room to be untidy, Susan, and I was out earlier—"

Suddenly the gleam in her eyes blazed into passion.

"How dare you! How dare you stand there telling lies to me? Do you think I'm blind and deaf? I know what you are doing! You are always trying to spoil my work—to ingratiate yourself—to win her—" She stopped, the almost incoherent words ceasing as suddenly as they had begun. She drew a deep breath. "Go to bed," she said again, and waited till Amelia had left the room. Then, without a word to Audrey, trembling on her chair, she followed her.

In a few minutes Amelia came creeping stealthily back.

"I want a piece of rag for my curls," she whispered. "I've lost mine."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She trotted over to a work-basket and took what she wanted. As she neared the door again, Audrey's voice, sharp with despair, pursued her.

"Amelia, *could* you walk up and down your room just for a *little* while?"

Amelia's kindly, foolish face brightened with relief.

"What a one you are for thinking of things! Yes, dearie, and of course you'll be able to hear me and won't feel so lonesome."

"Yes, Amelia."

Amelia trotted to her side, and bent and kissed her forehead. Audrey flung her arms round her neck.

"You—you *will* make a noise, *won't* you, Amelia?"

"Yes, dearie, she can't hear me from her room—"

There was an intonation of contempt in her tone that brought the sudden quick color to Audrey's cheeks.

"Mother is so brave, Amelia," she said, in a tone oddly dignified.

Amelia snorted, but did not answer.

"Good-night," she said. "And be quick with your hem, now."

As she cautiously ascended the stairs a strenuous voice pursued her:

"Amelia, *could* you just—drop something? It would sound—*friendly*, Amelia!"

"All right, dearie," in a frightened whisper.

Audrey went back to her chair and tucked her feet up under her. That other night a black beetle had crawled along the floor under the table: she had a nervous horror of black beetles. From overhead there came three quick thuds, then a measured tread, then—bang! Amelia had dropped her soap-dish.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

A little, nervous smile curved Audrey's close-shut lips. She kept her eyes fixed on her work. In her hurry red dots began to mark her way.

The measured tread overhead changed into a series of quick thuds, jerky, heavy.

Audrey's imagination saw vividly a vision of Amelia amiably hopping, and a quick laugh broke from her.

It was such a babyish little laugh that it accentuated pathetically the strenuous gravity that followed it.

Bang! It was the soap-dish again. Fortunately the soap-dish was thick and solid.

Audrey worked at her hem.

After a little while more indefatigable hops. Almost the Bogey behind the grandfather's clock was forgotten. The vision of Amelia in her red dressing-gown and curl-rags was full of comfort and very mirth-provoking, and Bogeys hate laughter.

Later there was one last burst of energetic dancing, and after that only an occasional dropping of the soap-dish. Audrey understood that Amelia was in bed. The fear that she would fall asleep set her heart beating rapidly, and drove the needle in and out with a recklessness that resulted in somewhat crooked stitches and a prolificacy of red dots. Her lips moved now as she worked:

"Please, Almighty God, don't let Amelia go to sleep! Please, Almighty God, don't let Amelia go to sleep!"

At last the hem was finished.

Then came the awful moment when the lamp had to be put out, and the darkness of stairs and passages to be faced alone. As she extinguished the light there came from overhead a feeble and perfunctory bang, followed by a roll. Amelia was sleepy, and the soap-dish had rolled

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

across the room. Audrey realized that it was the last bang. A warm rush of gratitude helped her up the stairs. Outside her door she fought a small battle—the gratitude was still warm and it defeated fear. She scuttled along to Amelia's room, put her lips to the key-hole.

"Thank you, dear Amelia!"

From within came a muffled scream.

"Lord save us! You've given me palpitations! I always was timid. Run away, dearie. She'll hear us!"

"All right, but—I do love you, Amelia!"

CHAPTER II

WHEN Audrey was ten years old two things happened in her life. The first thing happened on a certain wild evening in April. Audrey hated storms. The atmosphere within the gray cottage when a storm raged without set her sensitive nerves jarring: vaguely she felt that there were many things she did not understand going on in company with the howling of the wind and the pattering of the rain. But after that April evening she never had quite the same feeling about storms. For the storm that night brought her Marcia Barrington.

A staid little figure with head down-bent, Audrey sat and studied geographical facts about the world in which she lived. She was alone, but from the kitchen came the welcome if melancholy strains of a hymn sung in Amelia's flat voice.

"A pen-in-su-la is a piece of land *almost* entirely surrounded with water," said Audrey. She glanced towards the window, against which the rain was dashing in a steady downpour. "This house will soon be a pen-pen-in-su-la." She fell into a dream in which they were prisoners in the house till a Prince Charming brought a gondola. . . .

The door-bell was pealing through the house! Audrey's geography book fell unheeded to the floor. No one ever rang—no one ever came—

Something had happened!

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Voices—a voice that seized at once on the child's heart: she had never heard anything the least like it before. What was it saying? . . . "So sorry . . . horse so terribly lame . . . if I can wait here . . ."

So soft—so slow—so beautiful—

Then the soft swish, swish of silk that was new to Audrey, and the door opened and Marcia came in.

"Is this your little girl? Are you learning your lessons, little one?"

Why couldn't she answer? Dumb, she stood there, all her sensitive, impressionable, starved nature afire.

"What a night!"

The speaker sank into a chair and flung open her cloak. Audrey had a glimpse of soft, light draperies.

"Audrey, take your book into the kitchen."

There was a new sternness in her mother's voice. Audrey bent to pick up the forgotten book, but Marcia Barrington interposed.

"Don't send her away. Come here, sweet, and let me look at you."

"Little one"—"sweet"—Audrey's pulses danced with joy; never had she heard such honeyed tones addressed to her before. She came slowly, her feet weighted with her shyness, and stood looking down; something lay on her lids, she could not raise them.

A few yards away Susan stood looking on.

"So you are called Audrey? Well, it is one of my favorite names. Is that a geography book? I wonder will it tell us how far the Hall is from here? Will my poor husband be quite drowned before he gets there, do you know, Audrey? I do believe he was glad the poor horse went lame, since it decided me to leave the cart!

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

But he could not be so cruel, could he? All the way from Fordingham have we come in a dog-cart, sweet! And yet I am not so very wet, am I?"

One swift, upward glance in which the child saw wet, gold hair. . . .

"I wonder do you dislike kissing, Audrey? Or would you give me one little kiss—?"

"We don't believe in such foolishness in this house!"

Susan's interruption came harshly.

A wave of scarlet agony swept over Audrey. Her beautiful lady had been insulted! Never would she speak to her again.

A little musical laugh—

"Foolishness, do you call it? Ah, well, it all depends on the point of view. I am afraid I am making a pool on your carpet—"

"It isn't carpet, it's linoleum, and won't hurt."

"Oh, very well. The water runs off my cloak, you see—it's rain-proof. Audrey, what is my hat like?"

Another upward glance—to meet beautiful, smiling eyes this time—a glimpse of a wonderful face—

"Audrey, take your book to the kitchen!"

But Audrey's feet seemed glued to the floor.

And again came the soft pleading.

"Must she go? Come, we will learn the lesson together. I am afraid my geographical knowledge is quite shocking; it will be good for me, too—"

"Audrey, didn't you hear what I said?"

"Yes, Mother, but"—a pause, a gasp, and out it came, almost a defiance—"I don't want to go!"

Then with the harsh "Go at once" softening it, making it bearable, was the warmth of arms about her, a kiss,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

a soft little "Your mother wishes it, dear," and Audrey found herself moving towards the door.

In the kitchen Amelia talked: vaguely Audrey heard, but her mind was dreaming.

"Home from their honeymoon—luggage sent on. Dog-cart on an evening like this, to be sure! Any one could see that that sunset meant a storm. He's a fine man. It's a good two miles to the Hall. . . ."

"She is very beautiful," Audrey said, seriously.

Amelia arranged some plates on the dresser with a certain aggressiveness.

"It's wonderful what a difference fine clothes make!" she declared. "Ah, I would like to see you dressed out as you ought to be—in lace and silk! You're as good as she is, every bit. You're not exactly pretty—you're too pale; but you'd look different dressed properly." She came close up to Audrey. "Don't you ever want to be dressed in pretty things?" she asked, confidentially.

Slowly the red crept over the child's face. She nodded. "But it's very wicked," she added.

Amelia tossed her head.

"It's only natural," she declared. "Blood will out!"

She went back to the dresser. Presently she looked round.

"Your father was a gentleman, you know," she said. "He had estates, and a great house with thirty-eight rooms in it, but when he died it all went to his cousin."

Audrey eyed her earnestly. This father who had died when she was a baby was full of a wonderful interest for her. But she dared not ask her mother questions.

"Was—was he a *handsome* gentleman, Amelia?"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Amelia considered.

"Well, he wasn't what you might call *handsome*," she said, "but he was that good! Oh, he *was* a religious gentleman!"

A tiny sigh escaped Audrey's lips. It was strange that such wonderfully good parents should have such a naughty little girl, she thought.

"Tell me some more, Amelia," she besought.

"Well, this was how he met your mother. He sprained his ankle outside the farm where she lived, and they carried him in, and she nursed him, her mother being dead. He was getting on, you see, and so was she, and his aunt, who'd always kept house for him, had just died, and they do say that his housekeeper had her eye on him and worried his life out; and your mother's a famous cook, I will say, and her beef tea's not to be beaten, and—well, that's how it was, you see, dearie; and a fine thing for her, I must say, though pretty hard that he should have—died so soon, and all the estates and money gone to his cousin except a few hundreds a year and this house which your mother had once told him she'd like to live in—" Amelia paused for breath.

Audrey sat with a puzzled little frown of dissatisfaction on her brow. Somehow the story as told by Amelia did not sound particularly attractive; it lacked romance. But in a minute the child's quick imagination was busy "filling in." She saw a big man, sick, like a wounded hero, in bed, her mother bringing dainties to his couch—but there there came a halt. Here sense of the fitness of things demanded that long golden curls should hang around her mother's face, that her little hands should be white as snow. . . . Ruthlessly before her eyes rose a vision of her

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

mother . . . and her hair . . . and her hands were brown. She sighed.

"Tell me some more, Amelia," she urged.

But Amelia's rare communicativeness had sunk into a sudden sulkiness, with which the child was only too familiar.

"Don't you bother me so. Get along with your lessons!" she said.

Audrey obediently opened her book.

"A pen-in-su-la is a piece of land . . ."

Presently her mother came into the kitchen to fetch her visitor a glass of milk.

"Audrey," she said, "go to bed now."

The child glanced up at the clock on the mantel-shelf: it was half an hour earlier than her usual time for bed. She slipped slowly to the floor: the visions in which she had been indulging—visions of good-byes between her and the beautiful visitor—crumbled about her. For the second time that night she essayed the hitherto unattempted feat of putting her will against her mother's. It was a pitiful little attempt enough, but it was significant to Susan.

"I—I needn't go for half an hour more, Mother."

"You will go when you are ordered, Audrey."

Susan poured the milk into a tumbler. Audrey stood by her chair watching. Then she spoke.

"It— isn't—my bedtime," she said.

Susan turned and looked at her.

The child flushed and began to move unwillingly towards the door.

"Your bedtime is whatever hour I tell you to go to bed," Susan said.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

The little old-fashioned figure reached the door, and passed out.

“Audrey!”

She turned and came back. With the unquenchable hope of childhood she wondered had her mother changed her mind. It was a thing that would have been absolutely unparalleled in the child’s experience, but the face that she turned to Susan was alight with tremulous hope. For a minute Susan stood looking at her; then her voice said, in measured accents:

“You did not bid Amelia or me good-night, Audrey.”

All the light was quenched in the child’s face; tears clouded the eager eyes.

“Good-night, M-Mother. G-good-night, A-Amelia.”

A little later Audrey, sitting up in bed, heard the visitor go.

Then she cried herself to sleep.

An hour or so later something woke her. She lay quite still, waves of hot terror passing over her. Something was in her room. She could feel it. She had heard it. Then the moon sailed through clouds and gently showed her that it was her mother kneeling there beside her bed. Audrey’s eyes kept wide: the terror was gone, but surprise was keen.

“Mother!” she said, in a funny little voice.

“Did I wake you? There, go to sleep again, Audrey.”

She found herself suddenly clasped tightly in her mother’s arms—so tightly that she could hardly breathe. Her mother’s voice, all hoarse and queer, was speaking to her, her face pressed close to hers.

“You don’t love her better than me, Audrey? . . . Just because she’s beautiful, and wears beautiful clothes. . . .

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

You do love me, Audrey. . . . I'm your mother . . . you don't care about pretty clothes . . . and wicked things like that. . . . I never did . . . and your father never did. . . . It's only because you're so young . . . that's all. . . . You're good, really. . . . You're like us, and so you'll hate worldly adornments as I do. . . . Yes, you will. . . . Audrey, why did you look at her so? . . . She speaks softly, but it doesn't mean anything—Audrey, you don't love her more than your own mother, darling? . . .”

Audrey, hot, half-smothered, her heart beating rapidly, her mind a whirl of wonder, was filled with a passionate joy: her loneliness seemed suddenly a thing hideous and done with.

“I love you more'n the whole world, Mother!”

Her mother's arms relaxed about her. She kissed her gently.

“I am sorry I woke you, dear. Now go to sleep,” she said, quietly.

The moon showed the brown little furrowed face oddly softened; the lines of worry and anxiety seemed wiped out; new lines of tenderness seemed to have taken their place.

When Audrey woke the next morning she was jubilantly convinced that all the world was different now. She dressed to a joyous song within her—a song where a tender mother reigned: a mother who kissed and petted her. . . . Somehow the want of golden ringlets and white hands did not seem to matter now. . . . With a child's unquestioning faith she joyfully welcomed the new condition of things. She went down-stairs, her pulses dancing, her heart beating with anticipation. With a sudden odd little shyness she turned when she reached the hall,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

and ran into the garden, away from the kitchen, where she had caught a glimpse of her mother's skirt.

The garden was small, and wore an air of sadness, owing to neglect. No flowers flourished there; the only part cultivated at all was given up entirely to vegetables. To Susan, flowers were one of the "fripperies" of life: she classed beneath the same heading many other beautiful things, such as music, art, and literature.

But on this morning in early April even that sad little garden was full of beauties. The scent that rose from wet mould and grass exhilarated Audrey: the new little leaves and buds on the trees were all wet and fresh; they shook down rain-drops upon her as she passed beneath. The long grass made her shoes wet, dew-drops sparkled like diamonds everywhere. Something compelled her to deck herself with a nosegay. She had never done such a thing before; but, then, wasn't everything changed now? With a gayety somewhat tremulous at its own daring, she made a bouquet of parsley and a few strands of the long grass, and fixed it into the front of her frock. Then she went into the house. She went slowly, because the bouquet and the circumstances made her feel shy, but her face shone with joyous anticipation.

Shyly she stood in the kitchen door, hesitating. . . .

Her mother was at the table cutting bread and butter.

She looked round.

"Good-morning. What is that you have in your dress? Flowers! Go and take them off at once. You are a very vain child to deck yourself out so!"

Audrey went slowly.

CHAPTER III

A DEMURE figure in scanty gray frock, her head crowned with a hideous little black straw hat, Audrey sat in church. This was when the second thing happened.

It was several weeks since the first thing had occurred. Audrey had seen no more of Marcia Barrington. The Hall, although in another parish, was only about two miles from the gray cottage, but Audrey's walks with her mother never extended far.

Now she sat in church, and reflected sadly that she was a very miserable sinner. For through a window she could see the pink-clad boughs of a may-tree waving in the breeze. On one of the branches a thrush was perched, and he was singing and singing—right into the church his sweet, impudent voice penetrated. Audrey tried not to hear; she tried not to see— What a miserable sinner she was! The proper places for one's eyes in church were book, preacher, or folded hands. Ears should hear only the preacher's voice. Why was she so wicked, when her mother was so good? Oh, dear, how funny she did feel inside! Why couldn't her hands lie still in her lap? Why did her feet go mad if she didn't move them—just ever so little? . . . The thrush was singing about his nest, which was built in among all the pink may, and none of the baby thrushes ever went to church. . . . "My friends,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

in those days God appeared to His people"—oh, how wicked she was! She wished the thrush would go away. When her mother was a little girl she never listened to birds singing when she was in church; she never tried to smell the may. . . . "Please God, make me good." . . . Even before she was in church she had been naughty: walking beside her mother she had wanted to run and skip, and you mustn't run and skip on Sunday. . . . "Oh, please God Almighty, don't let me smell the may."

"Audrey, don't fidget!"

It was her mother's whisper in her ear. Scarlet, Audrey stiffened legs and arms, and fixed her eyes strenuously upon the rector.

The Rev. Arthur Shirley was a rotund little man; everything about him was round: his bald head was round; his face, his figure, his legs—all were round. But he was possessed also of an impressive manner that some people dubbed pomposity. His mouth was round, too, like a baby's, and Audrey found her depraved mind wondering if a cherry would fill the round— She had resort to the text: always, at dinner, she had to repeat the text to her mother. .

"Psalm Ninety-seven, ninth verse. 'For Thou, Lord, art high above all the earth in a may-tree—'"

She drew up with a gasp of horror. Never had she been quite so wicked before. Tears crept to her eyes. She really did not dare to ask God to forgive her.

She tried to repeat the text correctly:

"'For Thou, Lord, art high above all the earth: Thou art exalted—exalted—thou art exalted—thou art exalted—'"

A bluebottle buzzed in her ear; her eyes followed it as it

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

flew away, then decorously fixed themselves once more on the rector.

Gaily the bluebottle came along; no reverence had he for the church; he buzzed jauntily round the bald round head of the portly little rector. Audrey watched, fascinated. The bluebottle settled on the very apex: the rector, in the middle of an impressive rhetorical effort, raised his arm and brushed the bluebottle away. But it came back; it settled again in the very middle of the bald spot on the borders of the dozen long hairs that the rector arranged with so much care to lie across his head from left to right, and so soften the outline of his baldness. Three times the rector repelled the attack, but the fourth time the bluebottle returned fresh and unabashed. Once more the avenging arm swept upward. "Er—in those days the Lord God Almighty showed Himself a God of war and—" Up went the arm; the lunge was wilder this time, the rector's countenance was unduly flushed, and when once more his arm descended to his side, the dozen long hairs hung in limp disarray over his left ear, and exposed the fact of his baldness, unsoftened and unshadowed to the light of the day.

Up into Audrey's throat a wild giggle rose: terrified, she swallowed it, and fixed her eyes desperately upon the hands folded so meekly in her lap. Throughout the battle between the rector and the bluebottle she had felt an unrighteous stirring within her. She dared not look towards the pulpit: the laugh was waiting there in her throat. She swallowed again agonizedly; she lifted her eyes intuitively in search of something to steady her. They fell suddenly upon a fair head shining gold in a shaft of sunlight. The owner of the head was a broad-shouldered

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

youth of about sixteen or seventeen. He sat a little in front of her, to the right. She drew in a deep breath of admiration and awe. What would he think of her if he knew that she had nearly laughed in church? The clear-cut profile turned her way was full of gravity and thought; the brown eyelashes were lifted in an upward sweep. Audrey felt her wickedness dying beneath the influence of this young saint, who was so different from any one she had ever seen—who stirred something within her. . . .

A deep abasement seized upon her poor little soul: how immeasurably she was beneath him! What would he think—? The clear-cut profile moved a little, turned towards her. At that moment the indefatigable bluebottle returned to the attack—the rector made a fierce and undignified lunge—one long hair swung out . . .

Audrey's gaze leaped back desperately to the saintly youth's profile. It turned more towards her—a gay blue eye came round and met hers—an eye of irresistible humor—and—through the church rang out a shrill little childish laugh! It was smothered almost directly; it ended abruptly in a trembling choke, but every one had heard it. She had done the unpardonable thing: she had laughed in church.

Scarlet, abashed, prepared for the end of the world to come upon her, she felt her mother turn to her, she heard the awful pause in the rector's sermon. . . . Then his voice resumed its discourse; her mother sat stiff and still.

She blinked away hot tears of shame, then ventured a peep at the boy who had really worked all the mischief. Would he be terribly shocked? Very terribly shocked?

As if he felt her eyes upon him, he turned and looked

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

at her. His head was down-bent, his eyebrows were up, his mouth pursed, and slowly he shook his head at her, then turned away again. Audrey, demure in her seat, was swept along upon a sudden warm flood of happiness. So warm was it that it melted, for the time being, the fear and terror that held her in its chill grip. She forgot to look at the pulpit; she forgot to look at her folded hands; her eyes, full of a rapt admiration, never wavered from their study of the bad young man's good-looking profile. . . .

Shut up in her little bedroom throughout the long afternoon, Audrey wrestled with the following:

"The first requisite in religion is seriousness. No impression can be made without it. An orderly life, so far as others are able to observe, is now and then produced by prudential motives or by dint of habit; but, without seriousness, there can be no religious principle at the foundation, no course of conduct flowing from religious motives: in a word, there can be no religion. This cannot exist without seriousness upon the subject."

Up in her room wrestled Audrey.

"The first reckysite in religion is ser'ousness no expression can be made without it." Like a sober parrot she repeated it; once she had laboriously spelled it out, but between her and the book rose Prince Charming's face, gay and debonair; little enough recked he of any seriousness. Abashed she still was, ashamed and repentant, but for the first time in her life she had a fellow-sinner. For he, too, had smiled, and he had not turned from her in disgust at her wickedness. . . . "The first reckysite in religion," murmured Audrey, dreamily. The book of sermons slipped to the floor.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

“‘The first reckysite . . .’ oh, he’s very beautiful—he’s as beautiful as the Beautiful Lady, and he laughed at me. . . . ‘The first reckysite . . .’”

Audrey only knew one fairy story. Her mother disapproved of fairy tales. But once when she had been ill Amelia had told her the story of the Sleeping Beauty. Amelia’s imagination was as limited as her vocabulary, and the story, as presented by her to the child, was shorn of most of its beauties. But Audrey’s imagination was not limited; it seized with avidity on the meagre outline, and filled in with unending wealth and richness of detail. And that afternoon the Prince Charming who kissed the Sleeping Beauty into life was ruthlessly shorn of his sweeping black mustache, shaved of his curling ebony locks, and emerged, fair, clean-shaven, his liquid dark orbs suddenly grown blue and gay.

So Audrey dreamed.

At the end of the passage a door shut sharply and woke her. Affrightedly she picked up the volume of sermons. All in a parrot whirl of flurry—

“‘The first recksite religion is ser’ous no expression be made without it,’” Audrey gasped.

CHAPTER IV

AUDREY lay, a small, gray dab on the grass, and wept bitter tears into *Taylor's Primer*. Face downward she lay, her head buried in the musty pages of the spelling-book, whose most mysterious intricacies had been conscientiously mastered by her mother when she was a little girl. Audrey's dingy skirt was scant and short, and the despairing abandonment of her legs was as pathetic as the dejected hang of the two ruddy-brown pig-tails.

"Well, now, I'm sure it isn't as bad as all that!"

Audrey jumped; then she peeped; then she sat up stiff and straight.

"Oh!" gasped she, and over all her wet face a flood of rapturous scarlet swept.

From a height two gay blue eyes looked down upon her.

Behind Prince Charming there was a beautiful chestnut mare; the sun glinting on her coat made it shine so that Audrey gasped again.

"Why," said Prince Charming, "that's much better! What's up?"

Abashed and hot silence.

Down he sat beside her, and picked up the damp primer.

"Oh, spelling!" he said, and suddenly she laughed.

He turned and looked at her.

"Ah! Now I remember! You're the mad little, bad little girl who tried to make me laugh in church!"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Oh, please I—I didn't *try*—I didn't know—"

"Your name?"

"Audrey."

"Then, Audrey, listen. I won't be spoken to like that. And, Audrey, if you dare to look at me as if I'm a bogie-man, I'll turn into one and gobble you up. Now, do you understand? And please, Audrey, would you mind taking off your hat?"

Eagerly she caught at the tangible part of his speech, and removed the hideous little black hat.

"Thanks," he said. "Now, I'm going to help you with your spelling. Is this the column? What's the first word? Im-mac-u-late! By Jove, what a scholar you are! Why, it's six times as long as you, pig-tails and all!"

"I—I'm *very* stupid," she assured him, in a shamed voice, "and *very* naughty."

"That's all right, then. I like naughty little girls; I can't bear good little girls."

Her eyes grew round at such heresy. Never had she encountered anything in the least like this heterodoxical young man. But his heterodoxy brought a certain new and warm feeling of comradeship to her: she ventured shyly one little wiggle closer to his side. Then, her absolute honesty impelling an unwilling tongue, she amplified the tale of her stupidity.

"When I remember the letters, I—I can't remember the words they belong to."

"Of course you can't," he responded, cheerfully. "That's because you don't know what the words mean. Now, 'immaculate'—it's a nasty word, Audrey; when you speak of an immaculate person you mean some one beastly

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

—some one good and proper and respectable and everything they should be.”

Audrey's eyes were growing wider and wider.

“Isn't a good person always *nice*?” she queried.

She shrank back timidly as the mare approached. Prince Charming glanced at her.

“That matters, kiddie! You may be as naughty as you like, but you mustn't be frightened of any animal. Now get up and stroke her nose. She's quite gentle.”

Red but valiant she obeyed.

He smiled approvingly.

“You're rather a nice little kid, do you know, Audrey? Now, come along, and we'll master this stupid old column. And we'll settle the difficulty about a good person's being nice by sticking a 'y' onto the good. Goody persons can't possibly be nice, and they're always immaculate. Now, i-m—say that, Audrey.”

There was a pause.

Over the top of the book he looked at her.

“I'm going! I won't be looked at like that. What are you frightened of, you little goose?”

“You see, you—you don't know how *very* stupid—”

“Oh, is that all? I hate wise little girls. When I tell you to say 'i-m,' I sha'n't mind a bit if you say 'o-p.' Now, hurry up!”

Lying on his back, his gaitered legs outstretched, Audrey bolt upright beside him, so they worked through the column till she was letter-perfect.

“Stupid? Not you! Why, if it weren't for your pig-tails I'd be frightened of such a learned young lady. I bet your mother doesn't think you're stupid!”

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Slowly the red crept over her face—over her thin little neck.

“Yes, she does,” she admitted, shamedly.

“Eh? Does she?”

“Mother is such a *very* clever person,” she told him, eagerly.

He switched at his leg thoughtfully, sitting up and looking at her.

“I’m going to tell you a secret,” he said. “Come closer.” He pulled her to him by a plait. “Now, I’m jolly near being a grown-up myself, and so I know a few of their secrets, and this is one of them: they have an idea that it’s good for a poor little un-grown-up to be told she’s stupid. You see, they’re so very grown-up—some of ’em—that they forget all about when they were young, and so they think that’s a wise way to make her learn. See? They don’t really think she’s stupid—oh, yes, I know you’re thinking: ‘Oh, dear, then do grown-ups tell fibs?’ But, you see, they don’t reckon that kind of thing a fib at all. It’s for your good, or they think it is, but I don’t, and you don’t. We know better, and if ever we have anything to do with some poor little un-grown-ups we won’t tell them they’re stupid, will we? Or perhaps I may sometimes, because my father says it to me; but then he says it in a sort of way—chucking something at my head at the same time, you know—that doesn’t worry you a bit. If I do it at all that’s how I’ll set about it.”

She stared at him appalled. The comfort the first part of his speech had brought to her was lost in her horror at the picture called up by his last words.

“Oh!” she said. “Is your father *very* wicked?”

“Eh? Wicked? The governor?” He gave a shout

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

of laughter. "Why, he's the best old governor in the world! A bit obstinate and hot-tempered, that's all."

"But—but what do you do when he—he—throws something at you?"

"Catch it, and tell him to try again."

She sat silent. She was learning many things that May morning. Above a wall to the right a great bush of white lilac stood up clear against the blue sky. While she thought she fixed her eyes upon it: always afterwards white lilac brought back that morning with the glorious sharp snap in the air, and the brilliant sunshine that kept you so warm while you sat and thought; and always with the picture of it she heard the rustle and munch of leaves which Prince Charming's mare made in the dry hedge close by. . . .

"I'm afraid I must go home now," she said, in an old-fashioned little way that expressed nothing of the despair which she felt at the thought of parting from him.

"Eh? Oh, you like goodies better than me, do you, Audrey?" He took out his watch, while she gazed at him, dumb, with hot words of passionate denial seething within.

"By Jove, one o'clock! I must be off too, or they'll have eaten up all my lunch, won't they? Come and give me a kiss, kiddie."

She moved shyly to him, and gave his ear a timid little kiss. He put up his hand and rubbed the ear vigorously.

"Ugh! Ugh, Audrey! It was a beastly *peck*! A Sunday-school peck!"

She flushed hotly.

"I'm very sorry. You see, I'm not very used to kissing," she explained, abashed. "I have to be very care-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

ful with Amelia, because she doesn't like her curls to be disarranged."

"I don't mind my curls being disarranged a bit," he declared, cheerfully. "Who's Amelia?"

She gave a sudden childish little laugh, her eyes on his close-cropped head.

"You are very witty," she said.

His eyes twinkled.

"Who's Amelia?"

"She's a poor relation."

"Good Lord! Poor Amelia!"

"She told me once that she isn't a relation of mine, only of my mother's. She is very kind."

"Now, give me a proper kiss, Audrey!"

She stood hesitating, afraid that he might disapprove again of her salute. He sat smiling at her.

Suddenly she made a little run at him, and flung her arms round his neck.

"Oh, please—oh, please—!"

"Now, that was a good old genuine hug! What was the 'please' for?"

But she hung her head shyly.

"I'm very assuming," she declared, in a small voice.

"Ask for anything but my mare and my tie, Audrey, and I promise not to think you 'very assuming.'"

But said Audrey, sedately:

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

She walked away.

A few yards on a voice close behind her exclaimed:

"I'm sure, by the hang of the pig-tails, she's weeping."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

A pair of hands clasped her thin little body and swung her high.

“Why, it’s a veritable Niobe! Now, Niobe, how about that ‘please, oh, please’?”

“It was only—only—*oh! won’t I ever see you again?*”

CHAPTER V

“**A**MELIA, did you ever meet a Prince Charming?” Audrey spoke in a whisper fraught with much meaning. She sat at the kitchen table on a wooden chair, a bowl of water, a tray, and a bundle of rhubarb before her. On her arm she held a clean towel. The firelight shone on her hair, picking out gleams of red-gold in the brown. Her face, alight with eager interest, was turned to Amelia, who was darning stockings.

“Did you, Amelia?”

She held a stick of rhubarb suspended while she awaited Amelia’s answer.

Amelia gave a foolish simper.

“I was greatly admired by the gentlemen when I was a girl,” she said.

The lamp was placed close beside her on the table; its light shone mercilessly on her long face.

Audrey studied her earnestly.

“Was it your *curls*, Amelia?”

Amelia tossed her head.

“They have always been much admired.”

Audrey wiped the stick of rhubarb with the towel.

“Did Prince Charming ever come and kiss you, like the one in the story, Amelia?”

Amelia emitted a little scream.

“Oh, how shocking, Audrey! Suppose your mother

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

was to come home and hear you. And her so particular—never making allowances for any one. She'd never understand a sensitive nature like mine, not if she was to live to be a hundred."

Audrey rubbed sticks with laborious care.

"She is a very good lady," she said, staidly.

The dignity in the funny little old-fashioned words silenced Amelia, as it had silenced her before on the same subject. Amelia was naturally spiteful, naturally petty; and whereas Audrey never heard her mother utter a word against Amelia, in spite of the evident lack of any affection or sympathy between them, Amelia was always ready to put in a spiteful word about Susan.

Audrey picked up the knife, and began to cut the rhubarb into lengths of about two inches. She took great care to cut each piece the same length.

"I went to a party once where there were fifty people," Amelia said, reminiscently.

"Oh, Amelia, *do* tell me! Oh, *please*, Amelia!"

"I wore a pink silk dress trimmed with white lace, and mittens and white shoes and stockings, and red roses in my hair and a spray on my shoulder. And my cheeks were as red as those roses, with the compliments I got from the gentlemen, dearie! I wouldn't like to say how many remarked on it. And there was one gentleman—he had beautiful black whiskers, and I remember as if it was yesterday how poetical he was. He whispered in my ear, 'Red as a rose is she!' Oh yes, I was a belle in those days!"

"Tell me *more*, Amelia!"

Amelia sniffed over her darning for a minute or two; then she looked up over her misty spectacles at the eager face bent towards her.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"The same gentleman"—she giggled behind a modest hand—"well, we got lively, you know, and he pulled one of my curls, and I boxed his ear!"

"Oh, Ame—lia!"

Audrey studied her face earnestly: she strove to picture an uncrushed, pink-clad Amelia possessing spirit sufficient to box a gentleman's ear—a black-whiskered gentleman, moreover.

"I would love to see you all beautiful in a pink silk dress," she sighed.

"It's gone, dearie, long ago. Susan doesn't hold with such things. Now, my mother was very different. Artistic she was, and all for beautiful things."

Audrey drew a deep breath.

Amelia's sharp nose was rapidly growing red: she blinked her eyelids and sniffed.

"You should have seen the beautiful wax flowers and fruit we had in the parlor, dearie! Three separate groups under glass shades."

"How *beautiful*, Amelia!"

"And pictures on the walls in gold frames, a dozen of them—real good pictures, that cost a lot of money. A pound she gave for the dozen, dearie—a whole pound! That was what she was like—so artistic."

"Did—did you have flowers in the garden, Amelia?"

"Oh yes, dearie, lots of them!"

"Might you *pick* them, Amelia?"

"Bless you, yes!"

Audrey's pale little face had grown very wistful.

"Did your mother love you *very* much, Amelia?"

"She was a good mother, dearie," snuffed Amelia. "I spent all my savings on extra bands of crape when she died,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

and never grudged it. And such a funeral she had! She'd saved a good bit in her time, and she left it in her will that it was to be spent on her funeral. Four horses to the hearse! And three carriages to follow! And the plumes and the velvet hangings! And the flowers! It was a beautiful sight! And the refreshments after! She'd left directions what to have—she hadn't forgotten a thing! Port wine we had too! Five handkerchiefs I used that day! Ah, I shall never forget it! Never!"

The deep regret in her tone testified to a wish that that glorious day might come again.

"Tell me *more*, Amelia!" came the eager voice. "Oh, you've *never* been so nice before."

"It's all through seeing that handsome young gentleman to-day, dearie! And the polite way he raised his hat and spoke to me! It stirred my heart. He's a real gentleman!"

A proud flush had risen to Audrey's face.

"He is a great friend of mine," she said, with a ridiculous little air of pomposity.

"Ah, well—" Amelia began, and stopped there.

"What, Amelia?"

"Nothing! You hurry up with that rhubarb, Audrey!"

Audrey started cutting again: silence reigned, broken only by the click-clacks of her knife, as she cut through the rhubarb.

"It's a sad world," Amelia started, ruminating aloud. "There are poor creatures who never did any one any harm cut off from all society in a lonely old house a mile from even a cottage. I'm sociable by nature. I like to sparkle in society! If you'd told me that when I came here eight years ago I'd have stopped longer than just to

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

—well, more than a night, I'd never have believed you! But I always was timid, and all my other relations in America! Many's the time I wish I hadn't come here that day! And a lot of good I've done by coming too! And her always suspicious—I should be comfortable in America to this day if it hadn't been that I always was so susceptible to the other sex! And couldn't resist coming along with her when I heard he had gone to England. And then to follow her here! And stay here!—" From this half-maudlin jeremiad Audrey grasped an alarming fact.

"Oh, Amelia, you won't go away and leave me? Oh, *promise* you won't, Amelia!"

Whereupon Amelia wept.

"So there's some one to love me, after all!"

CHAPTER VI

OVER the grass undulated Audrey; with stately step and slow she swam along, turning her head now this way, now that. The turn of her thin little wrist as she held up an imaginary train was the embodiment of elegance; disdain crinkled her insignificant nose; her chin uplifted itself. In her hair, stuck rakishly through a plait, was a long spray of wild hyacinth.

A red cow eyed her mildly; she appeared to be pondering over this queer small mortal and her queer actions, but she may have been merely thinking of the cud she was chewing. But another pair of eyes watched amusedly over the hedge; there was no doubt that the owner of these eyes was pondering upon Audrey and her actions.

Suddenly she sank to the ground, and lay prone, her face upturned to the blue skies. In an instant she was up again, and stood frowning down upon the grass. Then once more she sank, and lay still.

When she arose and swam again upon her languorous way Prince Charming vaulted the hedge and approached her. She did not see him till he stood bowing before her, his hat clasped to his breast.

The startled color leaped to her face, then she turned and ran—ran away, all her dignity gone, her plaits flying out behind her, her thin legs kicking up in desperate and most unstately haste.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

He overtook her, caught her, swung her up.

"Do you call that a nice greeting, young lady?"

She wriggled.

"Were you such a very grand dame just then, Mistress Audrey, that you couldn't bring yourself to greet a mere nobody?" he teased.

"I—I want to go home," she sobbed.

"Go along then."

He put her down, and eyed her laughingly.

She stood, head down-hung, her small fingers twining nervously in a bit of her gray skirt: her very neck burned.

"You've lost that beautiful hat of yours," he said.

She turned to seek it.

He walked beside her.

"When I was a kid," he said, carelessly, "I was mostly a Pirate King or a Great General. Sometimes I was a Prince at a Ball, and then there'd be a Beautiful Princess, and she'd pace the floor as you were doing just now, and she'd wear flowers in her hair—"

"I am very silly!" came a shamed murmur.

"You're too jolly well fond of calling yourself names. That's what's the matter with you. But why did you fall down?"

A little of the nervously sensitive horror was abating beneath his careless kindness.

"I—I was fainting. You see, I was very genteel."

"So it's genteel to faint, is it?"

"Oh yes! Amelia's mother was *very* genteel, and she *always* fainted when she wanted a new bonnet and her husband wouldn't give her the money for it. And she fainted when it rained on Sunday and it would have spoiled

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

her Sunday dress to go to church, and she fainted and stayed at home."

"An adaptable sort of lady," he observed. "Let's sit down a bit, Audrey, or perhaps I shall faint, too. Don't sit on your hat, though it might improve it: it certainly couldn't hurt it." He stretched himself out on the grass and sniffed. "That smells good—eh, young 'un?"

"It's hyacinths in that cottage garden," she said.

"Ever wondered why blackbirds always wear their Sunday clothes, Audrey? Kind old chap to come and sing to us. He's a wicked old sinner, I believe—sure his beak's made up. Now, isn't it? Did you ever see such a yaller beak in all your many days?"

Audrey sat watching the blackbird: the dreamy silence lasted a long while: then he flew away.

She turned to her companion.

"He's gone," she said.

He lifted a lazy hand and pushed up his panama hat.

"I was just going to sleep, Audrey!"

"Oh, I—I'm *very* sorry!"

He sat up, and taking hold of a plait, pulled her to him.

"Don't be so beastly good!" he said, shaking her.

"Don't look at me like that! Shut your eyes!"

She shut them obediently.

"Oh, kid, open them!"

She opened them wide—great, wondering, hazel eyes. It struck him for the first time that they were beautiful.

"Audrey," he groaned, "if you go on being so disgustingly good you'll end by turning into a beastly little prig! Don't be so good! Now when I said that you had roused me, you should have chuckled (I'll have to teach you how

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

to do a diabolical chuckle), and you should have said: 'Serves you right, old lazy bones!' Say it now!"

"Oh, please—oh, I *can't*—"

"You must, Audrey! You've got to. Hurry up."

A sudden spasm of humor struggled to life in her over-charged bosom. She lifted her head and the gleam of it shone in her face.

"I won't! You told me to be naughty, so I w—won't!"

He gave a shout of laughter.

"Bravo, little 'un! You're getting on! But the wob—wob—wobble at the end spoilt it rather. I can't make you say it now, can I? Out of my own mouth I stand convicted."

She sat marvelling at her own daring. Over by the blackberry hedge, in the bank beneath, a primrose had stretched up, long and slim, and its little pale face was watching softly. She wondered was it surprised, too?

"Audrey, don't sit up so straight. I don't think such a stiff back is proper on a day like this!"

"Mother says little girls must always sit up straight."

"Does she, by Jove? Oh, well, let's go for a walk."

"I can't come very far, because it's nearly dinner-time, and I don't *quite* know my geography yet."

"Geography! Tuck that book away at once! Don't let me see it."

The walk extended itself beyond the limit allowable, and Audrey arrived home, hot and breathless, just as Amelia was washing up the dinner plates.

"You'll catch it!" so Amelia greeted her. "You know she won't allow unpunctuality. I've left out a bit of stewed mutton for you. You're to have it in here, but go and tell her you've come back first."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Something clutched at the cowardly little legs and held them fast where they were.

"I can't! Oh, Amelia, couldn't *you* tell mother I'm back?"

"Not me! Don't be such a baby. She won't eat you!"

Audrey knew that. She knew that not much would be said, but no amount of such reasoning could bring courage to her shrinking spirit. She was shy, very sensitive, timid, with a wealth of love seeking some outlet in her hot little heart. In spite of her mother's undemonstrative methods, in spite of her undeniable harshness, Audrey loved her; but her love was driven back on itself; she shrank sensitively from rebuff, and early learned to hide her feelings from her mother. But there were two occasions that the lonely child hugged in memory. One was long ago when she had had measles. The mother who had nursed her; watched over her, fed her, was not the mother of every-day life. She had been tenderness itself; gentle, patient, not demonstrative even then, but Audrey had felt the love watching over her. She had dared to fling her arms round the lean brown neck, and rest her head on her mother's bosom. The other occasion to be gloated over in memory was the night when Marcia Barrington had rested in their house, and Audrey had wakened to find her mother beside her bed.

"Oh, *do* go and tell her, Amelia! Oh, *please* do!"

Amelia put down a plate.

"Very well, then. You hurry up with your dinner, dearie."

"You are *very* kind, Amelia!"

Audrey was left alone in the kitchen; she tried obediently to eat her dinner, but she was too intent on listening and waiting for it to be much of a success.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Amelia came back.

"That's all right, dearie. You're to eat your dinner, and then get out your sewing, as usual."

"Oh, wasn't she angry, Amelia?"

"No, not a bit."

"*I do* think you're a ministering angel, Amelia!" Audrey said, with fervent earnestness.

Amelia bridled, and washed a plate.

"Oh, I always did have a kind heart, dearie. I didn't want you to get into trouble, so I just told her you'd dropped your geography book, and had to go back a long way to look for it."

There was a silence. Audrey pushed away her plate, and rose.

"You've never finished already, dearie?"

"I don't want any more, thank you."

"Well now, what a poor appetite you have! You take after me. I always had a delicate appetite."

Amelia, as she spoke, was rapidly eating up the mutton left by Audrey.

Audrey stood by the door and looked out into the garden at a row of cabbages.

"But I—I didn't drop my geography book, Amelia," she said, timidly.

"Bless the child, do be careful! After all the trouble I've taken, too. Of course you didn't drop your book! I said that to save you being punished."

Audrey stared at the cabbages: twice she opened her lips to speak, and shut them again; then, almost in a whisper:

"But it—it was a lie, Amelia!"

"Yes, of course it was," cheerfully assented Amelia,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"and the quick way I thought of it too! And all for you, dearie!"

There was a longer pause this time.

"Three-quarters of an hour late, you were" Amelia pursued then, "and if I hadn't been so quick to help you, you'd have been shut up in the box room, I expect—"

"Oh no, Amelia! Oh *no!*"

"I expect you would. But I've saved you from all that."

She was drying a tumbler. "Do you ever talk of me to the young gentleman, dearie?" she insinuated.

"Yes."

Amelia sniggered.

"You tell him how kind I am to you, and how you love me? Well, now, next time you'll tell him how I saved you from a severe punishment, won't you, dearie?"

Audrey stood silent, staring out into the dreary garden. There was something very desolate about the rigid little figure standing there alone—fighting a battle alone. But Amelia could not see or understand. She finished washing up; she put away the plates and dishes.

"Would you like a piece of bread-and-butter?"

"No, thank you, Amelia."

"You won't forget to tell him how I saved you from being punished, will you?"

The quick scarlet rushed over Audrey's face, her neck.

"I—I—you see, Amelia, I—I don't think he—he would like it."

"Not like me saving you from being punished! Well, I never! And why not?"

"It was a lie, Amelia. I know it was very kind of you, but oh, I wish you hadn't said it! Oh, I wish you hadn't!"

Amelia grew very red; her little eyes blinked rapidly.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

When she was angry her face coarsened, and lost its only attractiveness—a certain weak amiability, hardly strong enough to be characterized as kindness.

Audrey shrank back against the door.

“Oh, indeed!” Amelia began, her husky voice grown rasping. “Instead of being grateful, you pretend you’re so virtuous all of a sudden that you despise poor Amelia for trying to help you! You to be so grand and virtuous!” she snorted, derisively. “You, of all people! Oh, it becomes you, doesn’t it? It’s quite right and proper, of *course*, that *you* should look down on honest, respectable folk!”

She had worked herself up, as weak natures almost invariably do. “Ah, you nasty, stuck-up little cat!” she snarled.

Audrey was very white, her eyes wide with terror. She stood quite still, staring fascinated at Amelia’s unpleasant face.

“What are you going to do now?” sneeringly. “Go and tell your mother the truth, I suppose?”

“Yes,” said Audrey.

Amelia gasped. For a moment she was speechless.

“You—you—and how about me?”

“I’ve thought of that. I—I don’t know,” she quavered.

“Oh, pray don’t worry about me! I’m all right. She’ll only think you told me a lie first, and make your punishment a bit heavier. That’s all. *I* don’t mind. Run along and tell her. *Do* now!”

Audrey went slowly to the door.

This scene with Amelia had magnified the awfulness of the original trouble out of all proportion. She was shaking with nervousness, but, oddly enough, she held her head

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

high. Not before Amelia would she let it be seen how frightened she was! Her shaky fingers slipped and fumbled over the door-handle. Amelia laughed.

Sudden, wild anger flamed red in the child's face; she turned on Amelia, her eyes blazing.

"Be quiet!"

That was all, but Amelia's sneer died in her throat.

Audrey opened the door and went out. After her came a half-hearted laugh from Amelia.

"Hope you'll enjoy yourself!" she called out.

Audrey walked across the hall, then stopped outside the room where she knew her mother sat at work. Everything was very still; only in her ears there was a loud noise that worried her. She shook her head, but it would not go. There it was—thud—thud, thud—thud, thud—thud. She would not be able to hear what her mother said. . . . Inside the room a pair of scissors fell to the floor with a clatter; perhaps the scissors would be sorry for her. She turned the handle and went in.

Susan sat at the table working; she looked up.

"You are very late, Audrey—" Her voice broke off. "What is the matter?" she said, sharply.

Audrey stood just within the door; she shook her head, but the noise had grown louder, and would not go away.

"I didn't lose my geography book, Mother," she said.

There was a silence. She wondered had her mother spoken, and that noise in her ears had prevented her hearing. She glanced up fearfully; her mother was looking at her—her face was not angry.

"Come here," she said.

The noise died down a little. Audrey went up close beside her mother's chair.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"What made Amelia say you had lost it, Audrey?"

Back came that awful thud—thud, thud—thud, thud—thud.

What could she say? Loyalty to one who had tried to shield her tied her tongue.

"Tell me, Audrey."

"I—I can't, Mother!"

Another pause.

"She said it to prevent my punishing you for unpunctuality," Susan said.

"Oh, Mother! Oh, don't punish her! She said you would only think I had told her a lie at first—"

"No, I shouldn't think that, Audrey."

Something big seemed to have happened then to Audrey. The noise stopped; a great ache rushed into her throat, and suddenly she was crying—crying—

"Hush, Audrey! Don't cry so. I am not angry. You have told me the truth."

She was on her mother's lap; her mother was drying her tears. . . .

"Why were you so frightened, Audrey? You must not be so timid—so nervous. There, I'll say nothing to Amelia, as you have told me the truth. Try to stop crying."

Audrey gulped and sobbed up her tears as fast as she could.

"What made you late, Audrey?"

"I went for a walk, Mother."

After that she lay silent awhile.

It had happened—without design on her part, quite naturally to her—that her mother had heard nothing of Prince Charming. Her method of training had chilled, driven back all confidences—had made it almost impossible

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

for the child to speak to her on any subject that went deep with her. Even Amelia was easier, in a way, to tell things to; but neither to her nor to any one did the child really unburden her poor little soul. Amelia had been told—scantily—of Prince Charming, because it was necessary to Audrey's proud delight to find expression somewhere. But Amelia knew nothing of what those meetings meant to the child, nothing of the adoration she had given him.

But now, there on her mother's lap, there came a longing to tell her of him. Haltingly she began:

"You see, I went for a walk with—with the young gentleman, Mother."

"Don't say 'young gentleman,' Audrey. Whom do you mean?"

"I—I don't know his name."

"A stray acquaintanceship! I have told you I will not have you speak to strangers, Audrey."

"He isn't a stray acquaintanceship, Mother. He—he was in church—he is very beautiful," in a shy whisper.

"Have you met him more than once?"

"Four times," said Audrey, proudly.

She looked up into her mother's face. There was something there that she did not understand. Susan's thin lips were shut closely; her bright little eyes stared out before her. And yet, to Audrey, she did not look exactly angry.

"Why did you never mention him to me, Audrey?"

"I don't know, Mother. I—I just didn't."

Susan studied the child's face; Audrey's eyes met hers, clear, beautifully honest. Yet Susan said, the words dragging as if loath to be uttered:

"Was it because you were afraid I should forbid you to meet him?"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She saw the child's face redden.

"No, Mother," she said, and she did not want to talk about him any more.

"Get out your sewing now," Susan said, quietly.

Audrey slipped to the floor.

"Aren't you going to punish me, Mother?"

"No."

She fetched her sewing, her work-box, and sat down; she put on her thimble, threaded her needle, and began her work. She looked pale; she had been through overmuch emotion within the last hour. She was not a robust child, and the loneliness of her life was not conducive to health; she was continually thrown back too much on herself. It was owing to her pallor that she had enjoyed the freedom out-of-doors lately, that had made the meetings with Prince Charming possible. Dr. Lawson, called in by Susan, had prescribed fresh air, plenty of fresh air, so the walks with her mother had given place to mornings out-of-doors, during which time lessons had to be studied for the afternoon. An hour's sewing was the rule, then two hours for spelling, dictation, reading, geography, history, and so on.

Audrey looked up from her needle-work, and stared surprised at her mother.

Susan, the never idle, sat, the towel she was hemming in her lap, her hands lying upon it; she was looking out before her, lost in thought. There was that in her face that made Audrey half rise to go to her.

At the movement her mother's eyes came back to her. She picked up her work.

"Don't fidget, Audrey," she said.

CHAPTER VII

AMELIA was snoring. Audrey paused in front of her and frowned impatiently. There could be no doubt about it—Amelia was certainly snoring. Audrey wondered: Dare she risk a pinch—the veriest nip of a pinch? But if it should rouse Amelia? Yet Queens never snored! She was quite sure they never snored. She stood in perplexity. The lamplight shone on her worried, earnest face; on the dishcloth pinned to the hem of her skirt; on the plaits wound round her head and tied in a sort of knot in front. It shone, too, on Amelia—head fallen over her right shoulder; mouth open; her shrunken little figure huddled in her chair; her high brow and roll of curls topped by a little bright tin cake-mold, tentatively placed there by Audrey, after slumber had closed Amelia's eyelids. Suddenly the worried face cleared—

“Hark how the faithful hound beneath thy chair growls unceasingly to keep danger from thee, oh, Majesty—Queen! And I guard thee, too, though but an unworthy Lady of Honor.” Up and down the kitchen, round the table, sailed Audrey. Her imagination, for the first time in all her short life, had been encouraged and fed lately by Prince Charming, and now it rioted with a joy, a triumphant glee, that transformed the somewhat bare kitchen into a glittering Palace; Amelia into a Beautiful Queen; her snore into the Warning Growl of her Faithful

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Hound—a glee that made the door between kitchen and scullery an ivy-twined window from whence she spoke with a Prince—a gay young blue-eyed Prince, of course, frank and tanned of face, shorn forever of all ebony locks and mustache; denuded of the interesting pallor that once had adorned his handsome features.

Languidly she leaned from the window.

“Fain would I join thee in thy old-fashioned garden where the peacocks strout! Fain would I walk with thee beneath the avenue of oak trees” (this was culled from some words Prince Charming had let fall about his home). “But I must guard my Crowned Queen. Thou may kiss my hand!”

Grandly the thin little arm was extended; with an immense condescension the chaste salute was allowed. This was not the shy Audrey Prince Charming was accustomed to meet beneath the skies of every-day life. As with so many shy children, Audrey, in her imaginings, was a bold creature—a creature who pursued her own way, scattering favors at her pleasure, and withholding them, too, as it pleased her. Round the kitchen table she sailed.

Some one tapped at the kitchen window. Audrey, brought back to every-day life, tore off the dishcloth, pulled at her plaits.

“It’s only me,” came a whining voice from outside.

She recognized Rebecca Day’s voice. She glanced uncertainly towards the slumbering Amelia; she knew that, for some occult reason, Amelia regarded any imputation of sleep as a deadly insult. But she did not want to open the window herself; she shrank sensitively from old Rebecca, who always smelled of spirits.

The next tap on the window roused Amelia; she started

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

up and the cake-tin fell with a clatter to the floor. Amelia regarded it with drowsy surprise.

"I've been sitting there worrying over that cake I burned this afternoon," she observed, going towards the window. "Who wants a drunken old woman in the house, I'd like to know?" Muttering, she flung up the window.

"Good-evening, Miss Harris," said the whining voice, a conciliatory note in the last words, "it's beginning to rain, and I do suffer that bad with the rheumatics—"

"Come in," Amelia said, "come and sit by the fire, Rebecca. I'm sure you're quite welcome."

The old woman went round to the door and entered the kitchen, while Audrey stood puzzling over the discrepancy between Amelia's welcome and her words as she went to the window. Amelia often puzzled her in that way.

Rebecca sat over the fire, holding out her hands to the warmth.

"How's little Missy? It's a cold night for the time of year; the mist seems to eat into your bones. A nasty night for the young gentleman from Elsham to go a long journey."

Audrey studied her wrinkled face and gnarled hands, and made her into a Wicked Old Witch.

"Up at the Hall he's been staying," pursued Rebecca; "very like his cousin he is—a well-set-up young man."

"Elsham?" Amelia said, excitedly. "Is he a fair young man, and tall?"

"That's him, my dear."

Amelia turned and winked at Audrey; there was sly meaning in her face. Rebecca's voice went meandering on about the folk at the Hall, and slowly Audrey grew cold and colder. At last she spoke:

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Has he gone away?" she said.

"Yes, all in a hurry. A groom is to go after him with his horse; a beautiful creature he is, too."

"It isn't 'he'; it's a chestnut mare," Audrey said in a dull little voice, of which no one took any notice.

So it was Prince Charming!

The mare made the dread a certainty. And he had gone! The world had become suddenly an impossible place to go on living in. She crept away into a corner and sat there, cold and filled with the cruel and final despair of childhood.

Rebecca went away after a little while. Presently Susan came into the kitchen.

"Audrey, it is your bedtime."

A little white face was turned to the light of the lamp; tragedy was written in every soft line.

"What is the matter, Audrey? Come here."

She came across to the table, looking dazed by her sudden entrance into the light. Susan took her hand, and led her from the room.

"What is the matter?" she asked again, once they were outside.

"He has gone away," Audrey said, in a dull voice.

"He? Who?"

"Prince Charming."

Susan's face was contorted suddenly by a queer spasm. She said no more, only led the child up-stairs to her room. There she undressed her, and put her to bed. Audrey was very gentle, very quiet.

"Thank you, Mother," she said, politely, as her head touched the pillow.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Susan left the room. When she re-appeared, a quarter of an hour later, Audrey lay as she had left her, straight out, on her back, her wide eyes fixed on the flickering candle. Susan carried a bowl of bread-and-milk.

"You must eat your supper, Audrey."

She sat up obediently, and swallowed the spoonfuls her mother put into her mouth. She did not remember to wonder why she was being fed.

When it was finished Susan put the bowl down on the table; then she came up to the bed, and stood looking down upon her. She said what was for her a weak thing to say, and a thing that rent her jealous heart as she uttered it:

"Perhaps he will come back, Audrey."

A quiver passed through the child.

"If he is a cousin of Mrs. Barrington's, he will be sure to come and stay with her again, Audrey. You must wait a little while, that's all."

Oh, blessed mother-wisdom!

Slowly the tragedy dissolved itself into a trouble with a possible brilliant ending to it.

She began to tremble with the relief of approaching tears. "He may come back any day."

It was Susan's face that bore the mark of tragedy now; every line and crease seemed deepened momentarily.

Audrey's tears came then.

"Oh, Mother! Mother!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE non-appearance of Prince Charming was rendered mercifully bearable by the eager hope that every day would bring him. But the days grew into weeks, and the weeks into months; the months into years; and he did not come. And slowly he was—not forgotten, but laid away as a beautiful memory. From that night when she heard of his going, Audrey's freedom was insidiously but inexorably curtailed. So it was that the people 'up at the Hall,' two miles away, were to her only a glorious dream, fed by pictures flashing by in dog-cart or on horseback. In these pictures, as the years went by, she saw various wondrous little golden heads, just like the golden head of the beautiful lady who had rested in the gray cottage on that stormy night. Once or twice she met one or two of the owners of the golden heads, generally fleeing from some retributive justice. But till she was a slim girl of sixteen she spoke to none of them. Then on one memorable afternoon in June she was returning from taking soup to a sick woman in the village. She was alone. She was walking along Monk's lane, which was hot and sweet with the scent of honeysuckle, and buzzing with bees, who were busy among the wild foxgloves that grew up the banks on either side. Suddenly through the hedge a voice hailed her; it was a beautiful little voice, and every

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

syllable was enunciated with a perfect clearness that gave an odd piquancy to the speaker's manner of speech.

"I say, are you any good at patching up a person?"

Audrey lifted startled eyes to the hedge. A small girl of about seven years was working her way through the brambles, gloriously unmindful of her dainty white frock. Her beautiful little face was pale; the sun shone on the silky fair hair that framed it like a halo.

Audrey recognized her as one of the children from the Hall. A thrill of excitement went through her.

"I can try," she said, shyly.

"Thanks," returned the small person, who was not shy at all. "It's in this field. We've had rather a bad smash-up. Can you climb through?"

"There is a stile just along here," Audrey said.

When she reached the field she descried a little white heap on the ground, and the small person who had accosted her regarding the heap.

A courteous voice reached her.

"It's mostly nose, so don't be frightened."

The heap proved to be a smaller edition of the first little girl, her beauty a good deal marred by the nose-bleeding which gave Audrey a sickening thrill as she came up.

"I told her to lie still. I thought it might stop. Isn't it *too* aggravating?"

Audrey was kneeling beside the ghastly little object on the grass. Her nose had stopped bleeding, but there was a nasty cut on her brow from which the blood still trickled slowly. "We will take her across to the stream over there," Audrey said. "Then I can bathe her forehead."

They carried her across the field, and presently, bathed, she presented a less terrible appearance. The bleeding

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

had ceased, and only a small cut and a slight puffiness of nose remained to show that there had been an accident.

"Are you hurt anywhere else? How did it happen?" Audrey asked.

"I hit my nose on the gate. Oh no, I'm not hurt at all, thank you."

"It," put in her sister gloomily, "was all the Professor's fault. We had given nurse the slip beautifully, and then the Professor came along on his silly old tricycle, so we had to run away, and when we were climbing that gate Tommy fell, you see. He's always doing things like that."

Her reasoning amused Audrey.

Tommy rose, and slipped a confiding hand into Audrey's. "I feel quite well," she assured her.

Audrey thought it better to go with her to the Hall. At the gates she left them.

"You have been most awfully kind," the elder child told her. "I'm Jimmy. She's Tommy. Our real names are Gwendoline and Sybil. We all have boy's names in our family."

"My name is Audrey Fielding," Audrey said, stiff, because she was so shy.

Then she went home to dream about it.

It was the next day that Marcia Barrington, with Jimmy and Tommy beside her, drove up to the gray cottage. She handed the reins to the groom, and came up to the door.

Audrey, her needlework fallen to the floor, watched from the window. An excitement, that between exquisite pleasure and a horrible shyness, was painful, made her tremble, as, wide-eyed, she watched and waited, peeping from the window. She heard that clear little voice again.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Isn't it too queer, Mother, to have no flowers in the garden?"

The hot sensitive shame that is so apt to magnify trifles made her shrink back appalled.

She heard Amelia show the visitors into the stiff, bare drawing-room that was never used. Then she came ambling round the door.

"What *ever* shall we do, dearie? Your mother's out! Don't things always happen so? What *can* she have called for? What beautiful clothes! Just like little angels, those children look! I'm all a-quiver, I do declare! I always was so sensitive—"

"Amelia, what shall I do?"

There was despair in the cry. To Audrey this call was a terrible thing, now that she knew her mother was out.

"Run up-stairs and put on your best dress, quick! Then go in and see what she wants."

"Yes, Amelia. Oughtn't we to ask her to have some tea?"

"I'll set the table quick in here, dearie! Don't you fret. You're as good as she is."

"Amelia," at the door Audrey stood, terror in her eye, "c—couldn't *you* go in?"

"It's your place!" Amelia declared, with unusual firmness. "And don't ask me to have tea with you, for I won't! You're different. And tie up your hair with your best ribbon, dearie. Hurry now!"

She followed her into the hall, and pursued her with a loud whisper as she ran up-stairs. "Mind you talk! It's very bad manners to sit silent, and don't fidget. Ask after the health of all her family, dearie! And—Audrey—"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

she followed her up a few stairs—"don't forget to apologize for the food."

Audrey paused, surprised. "Isn't there any cake left, Amelia?"

"Oh yes! And I made some fresh ones to-day with a bit of flour I had over from the pudding. And the butter's fresh in to-day."

"Well, then, it's all right, isn't it?"

Amelia fairly stamped.

"If you had all the cakes and jellies and jams in the world, it would still be the correct thing to apologize for them!"

"Oh!" Audrey said.

A quarter of an hour later the drawing-room door was opened, and a slim figure in an ugly brown frock entered. Above the ill-fitting and unrelieved neck of the frock, a small, pale, palpably terrified face looked out. There was something so pathetically young and shy and innocent about the little figure that Marcia Barrington experienced an unexpected inclination to take her in her arms. Instead she went forward, her beautiful face very sweet, and shook hands.

"I want to thank you," she said. "I have heard all about your kindness to that bad Sybil yesterday."

Audrey wanted to explain that she had done nothing; she wanted to tell her that she had loved doing it; that she wished she could have done more, and she said nothing—nothing at all! Over her face pink waves of color rushed and receded, but her tongue refused to say a single word.

Marcia went on talking in the musical voice that she had handed down as a gift to all her children. Jimmy and Tommy sat looking at Audrey.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Audrey's mind was filled only with the awful thoughts that in a few minutes she would have to pour out tea for them, and that it was "very bad manners to sit silent."

Presently, in a pause, came Jimmy's voice:

"Isn't it a beautiful day?"

"Yes," Audrey said.

Jimmy swung her slim legs, and waited for her to speak. Audrey knew she was waiting. In her mind she said: "Don't you think June is the loveliest month in the year?" She said it over and over, till it lost all meaning.

Marcia told her a funny anecdote of her youngest child. In her interest Audrey forgot herself: she bent forward, her soft eyes on Marcia's face. She laughed. Marcia found her oddly attractive. Amelia knocked loudly on the door.

"Tea's ready, Miss Audrey!" she said.

Audrey hated that "Miss." In spite of her shyness, she answered, clearly:

"Very well, Amelia dear."

She never called Amelia "dear;" it was a subtle indication of her character that she did it now.

Marcia said something about not staying to tea, thinking it kinder to her poor little hostess; but Audrey's horrified face, as she read into the refusal her failure to behave properly, made her change her mind.

It was a terrible ordeal: afterwards Audrey had only a hazy idea of what they had talked about. She remembered Marcia's explanation of her children's having boy's names. The eldest child had always been a boy in the Barrington family, and always named James. So Gwendoline, in joke, was called James. Then Sybil, reaching years of discretion, and backed by her sister, demanded a boy's name also. They had chosen Tommy between them.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"And we've christened Madeline, Dickie," Jimmy informed her. "The grown-ups choose our girl-names, and we choose the boy-ones. The girl-names don't matter so much. I hope there will be heaps more of us, because I want a Bobbie and a Ferdinand and John and Clarence."

"And Edwin," added Tommy. "Mother, may I ask for more jam?"

Audrey's hand shook as she poured out the tea. She forgot to put in milk. She could not eat the bread-and-butter on her plate. When they went away her face was no longer pale; two scarlet spots burned feverishly on her cheeks; her eyes were brilliant.

She shut the door when they had driven away. She ran up to her bedroom, and she cried and cried. . . .

In vain Amelia stood asking questions.

"Oh, go away! Do you hear? Go *away!*"

Rare passion stirred the poor child. Her heart and soul were sick with vague tragedies. The glimpse into lives so different from her own hurt and stung. She had been such an idiot! Oh, what a bad-mannered idiot she had been! How awful—awful she was when beside beautiful Mrs. Barrington! Why couldn't she have spoken?—laughed?—jested?

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Audrey composed the following: "Oh, no, really, there's nothing to thank me for! I only wish I could have done more. Poor little soul, how brave she was! . . .

"You like April better? Well, of course there are the primroses and bluebells, and spring is always so delightful, isn't it? The poet's favorite month, too. But what a cold spring we had this year, hadn't we? . . .

"Only seven? And may I call you Jimmy, dear, or

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

must it be Gwendoline? Gwendoline is one of my favorite names. . . . I am so sorry mother is out. She may come home at any minute. She will be so sorry to have missed you. . . . Not stay? Oh, really, you must! Just for tea. The horse can wait just for that, can't he? Oh, I could not allow you to go without any tea! I really couldn't. . . ."

So easy! Oh, so easy! With her handkerchief crumpled into a wet ball in her hand, sitting there alone, how easy it seemed! "Why didn't I talk like that?" moaned Audrey.

CHAPTER IX

MARCIA walked up and down the room. She frowned. The shaded lights gleamed on her pale yellow draperies. Marcia was fond of pale yellow. To-night she was worried.

"I must do something, Dick!" she said.

She sank into the low chair near her husband's.

"It's rather a difficult job, isn't it?" he replied.

"Of course it is. Horribly difficult. That's what worries me. But I can't get her dear little face out of my mind."

"And she isn't even pretty?"

"Oh, pretty! I don't know. Her eyes are beautiful. It would take more than prettiness to triumph over a frock like hers! I'm convinced she is starved."

He looked at her in mock alarm.

"Was she so thin, then?"

"Don't be silly, Dick. Sixteen! And so painfully shy! And in the twentieth century."

"She should be exhibited as a freak."

She leaned forward, resting her chin on her hand, elbow on knee.

"I'm very much in earnest, Dick," she said.

"I know, dear. I wish I could see some way to help you."

She smiled at him; the people on whom Marcia smiled invariably adored her.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"You were snubbed in that quarter once," he reminded her.

"Yes; nearly eight years ago! And I took the snub, and left that poor mite to her fate. I feel now that I was horribly selfish, Dick. We were selfish in those days, weren't we?"

She was laughing softly.

"In that sense, I'm still selfish," he said, unabashed.

"She let me see so very plainly that I was not wanted, that she wished that wet night to be the end, as it was the beginning, of our acquaintanceship. And, of course, it's rather a difficult position."

She rose and paced the room again; it was a way she had when agitated.

"Oh, how can I leave that child in that atmosphere?" she broke out suddenly, the motherliness that was such a large part of her nature making the matter a grave one to her. "To live in the dark like that. How will she be fit to meet her life? How will she understand? Her sensitiveness, timidity, shyness, all encouraged in that unnatural soil, till they grow out of all proportion—overpower all the healthy faculties of her nature. Trifles will be gigantic troubles to her! She will never understand enjoyment, as the young are meant to understand it. There will be drawbacks always. Her mind will be filled with dream-people. If she ever meets real people—later on—they will disappoint her horribly. For she has imagination—and humor, poor little soul. I saw it in her eyes—her mouth. Humor in that house! The pity of it! And refinement. It is a delicate, refined little face. What will she do when her mother dies? They mix with no one, from what I hear. I can see the years going on, till the child is a

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

young-looking old maid, almost as innocent and inexperienced as she is now; then her mother will die." She broke off abruptly. She came and stood before him. "Dick, didn't you once meet a cousin of John Fielding's?"

"Yes. Stayed at Fernhill with him once, years ago. Moberley had known his people, or something, and the old lady asked him down. Awful conceited ass. He came into the property when John Fielding was drowned. That's about sixteen years ago, I think, and he's never had anything to do with his cousin's widow and the child. I don't fancy he'll be much help, my dear."

"He doesn't sound particularly hopeful. I think I will leave him out. But I shall try to do something for that child."

She did try.

Susan was grim, almost rude. Marcia's beauty, her tact, made no impression upon her; but she compelled her thoughts out of a groove, and the result was that Audrey was allowed about once a month to spend a day at the Hall.

It is difficult to estimate what those days meant to her.

They did her an almost incalculable amount of good. That her mother, although allowing them, disapproved strongly she made evident by the firm silence she maintained on the subject of the Hall and its occupants. Repelled by her attitude, Audrey took refuge in a silence as complete as Susan's. She was too young and too much in awe of her mother to understand how her silence hurt and galled.

To Susan, narrow-minded, fiercely jealous, it meant only one thing—that Audrey did not consider her worthy to hear of her new friends. On those nights when the

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

girl, bright-eyed, came back from the Hall, Susan suffered terribly. She saw, with obstinate clearness, the day approaching when Audrey would finally give her up; she was sure now that the child was ashamed of her. The maternal instinct in her, so strong and fierce that it made a tragic thing of her life, blinded her to all reason. She had married late in life. She had grown up on a small farm, the only child of austere, very religious, parents. Up to when she was nearly forty years of age her life had been a narrow, practical one, full of hard work and hard religion. But from her earliest years there had been one inconsistency in her nature that had foreshadowed the future. It was an instinct, immature, not understood, but the strongest feature in her character—an instinct that led her to love everything young. To satisfy that instinct—and for that alone—she would forsake the narrow and rigid path of unswerving duty and honesty which she always trod. She, who ordinarily was of too practical a nature to have much imagination, would invent plausible reasons why the young things on the farm should not be killed; and she would present these reasons to her parents with an eloquence, a subtlety born of the instinct strong within her. And in her most rigid self-analysis a curious blindness took possession of her where this instinct was concerned: it was as if the strength of it was so great that it sucked all life from the conscientious scruples by which all her other actions were governed. She never saw that in the cause of the young things she swerved aside from the strict honesty that was hers by nature and upbringing.

She was thirty-eight years old when her child was born, and it was then that the instinct materialized into sudden,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

almost fierce, life. She was like a wild creature; she could almost have slain the nurse who took the child from her; but in the hard years of her life she had learned self-control, and it was only her eyes that betrayed the passionate jealousy that raged within her. She longed so fiercely, so strenuously to be strong and well, to let no hands but her own touch the child, that she worked herself into a fever, and for weeks was very ill.

Marcia Barrington, returning to the Hall after her visit to Susan, said, thoughtfully:

“Dick, there is tragedy in that little woman’s face. And in spite of her rudeness I like her.”

CHAPTER X

"OH! She's so ugly!" sobbed Bobbie.
They stood and eyed her wearily.

Bobbie lay, fat and obstinate, face downward upon the floor, and slowly there grew around her a widening patch of wet.

Jimmy said, thoughtfully:

"She's a peninsula; soon she'll be an island."

"James," Martin responded, "this isn't the time for epigrams. You're a feminine. What are we to do?"

"She'll very likely have rheumatic fever," Jimmy responded, gloomily.

"Or ammonia," Tommy further suggested.

"Bobbie, get up at once!" Martin said, sternly.

"Poor ole Bob 'll yell if you touch her!" warned that young lady, as he drew near once more.

Therein lay her power, and she knew it; she was quite aware of the fact that no one would risk her yells with her mother lying down, with a bad headache, in the room beneath the nursery.

"Isn't there any one else in the house she'd allow to touch her?" Martin turned to Jimmy, his blue eye baleful.

Jimmy shook her head.

"Most of them have gone to nurse's cousin's funeral, you see. There's cook, but she's worse than Mary."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Won't have ugly old things!" sobbed Bobbie.

"Well, I'm sick of this," Martin declared. "Let's leave her, boys! If she has rheumatic fever, it will serve her right."

They followed him from the room, eying him disapprovingly. Tender-hearted Dickie voiced the disapproval in trembling tones of woe:

"Cousin Martin, she's the youngest in the family!"

"Shut up, and wait," replied Martin.

They waited breathlessly, ears at door, till a voice reached them from within:

"Silly ole things, lis'nin' at the door!"

Then Martin, with an exclamation, vaulted down the stairs and into the garden.

"Now we can talk above a whisper," he said. "Of all the spoilt little wretches—"

"She isn't," interposed Jimmy, always loyal. "If you were used to mother, you wouldn't like ordin'ry people—"

Martin interrupted.

"We'll go down to the gate in the wall and ask the first pretty girl who passes to help us."

"Oh, Cousin Martin, won't you have to be introduced first?"

"Oh, Cousin Jimmy, you wait and see!"

With Dickie swung high on his shoulders, he raced down the sunlit path to the gate in the wall.

"There are very few pretty girls in Elsham," Jimmy reminded him, in a fastidious tone.

"You don't know my luck, old boy!"

He flung open the door, then glanced down with a smile at his small cousin.

For a girl was passing by, and it was evident that even

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

the fastidious Jimmy must include her in the category of pretty girls.

"Oh, it's Audrey!"

"Will you introduce me, James?"

Audrey's days at the Hall stood her in good stead now. The whirl back to nine years ago was disconcerting. Once more she met the gay blue eye of Prince Charming, once more she listened to his pleasant voice, and only a faint pink flickering in her cheek showed her perturbation. He could not know that she was wont to look, with an innocent regard, more directly into faces. Now her lashes cast demure shadows on her cheeks.

"Oh, Audrey, Bobbie really is *too* tiresome! We are most tremendously worried!"

The lashes lifted, and Audrey's eyes rested with relief on Jimmy's face.

"We want you to help us out of a difficulty, Miss Fielding," Martin explained. "I'm left in charge of four unruly cousins. . . ."

"Mother has a most *horrible* headache," put in Jimmy.

"Nurse and Ellen and some of the others have gone to nurse's cousin's funeral," supplemented Tommy.

From Martin's shoulder came a thoughtful little pipe:

"They're going to have a *lovely* 'At Home' after it."

"All went well," Martin pursued, "till Bobbie—you know Bobbie?"

"Yes."

It was a somewhat small "yes," and it was directed to Jimmy, but still it was an answer.

"Really, Martin, *how* absurd you are!" observed Jimmy, sweetly. "Why, she's our greatest friend!"

Martin was enthralled at the smile that overspread

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

the demure little face then: he forgot to go on with his tale. Jimmy finished the explanation in her own drastic way.

"That idiotic Bobbie sat on the ground and sang 'Rule Britannia' right through, so we began to play cricket without her, and then she started howling and rolled into the lake. So tiresome of her! And now she's lying on the floor in the nursery, and if we touch her she says she'll yell, and mother's in the room underneath, and she'll have rheumatic fever—"

"Or ammonia," from Tommy.

"And we're all shockingly worried," finished Jimmy.

"Spoilt little monkey!" annotated Martin.

"She's the very *youngest* in the family," Dickie reminded him, her eye reproachful.

"I will see what I can do," Audrey said to Jimmy.

She struck a quaint note in that garden on that day in May. Everywhere there was a wealth of color: the numerous little paths were bordered with great bushes of rhododendrons, now a mass of bloom, the colors ranging from the deep old-fashioned purple to palest pinks and whites; to the right of the gate there was a large bed of brilliant-hued azaleas. In the wealth of color Audrey moved quietly forward. There was no scrap of color about her, save for the red lights in her hair. A slim figure in gray and white, she went into the house and up to the nursery, where Bobby lay in a pool of water.

Now, when Bobbie was seized with these fits of naughtiness no one could manage her but Marcia. But on the present occasion she had been ruminating, and ruminating alone in a pool of water is conducive to repentance.

Bobbie was chilly and very wet and heartily sick of it

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

all. So that when they entered the nursery, though she still lay face downward on the floor, a deep blue eye peeped round at them, and Bobbie, always adorable, beamed alluringly.

"Holloa, Audrey!" she observed, with cheerful insouciance.

But Audrey was sufficiently the child of her mother's training to force herself to utter a shy—"You are a very naughty little girl."

Bobbie sat up and looked at her.

"Oh, dear, poor ole Bob's *so* wet!" she cooed, pathetically.

"I must change her clothes at once. Jimmy, show me where to find fresh things. Quickly, dear."

During the course of the changing, Audrey was treated to a good many whole-hearted hugs.

"Bob's *darlin'* ole Audrey! Bob's *loovilly* ole Audrey!" Audrey hugged back again.

Once she asked:

"Are you sorry you were so naughty?"

"Oh yes. Let's come and play cricket," was Bobbie's cheerful response.

But Audrey would not stay; she said she must go home. She wanted to get away, to think over this sudden meeting with the Prince Charming of nine years ago. He was bigger and browner now; his voice was deeper, but he had altered very little. She had never met him again during those nine years, though he had stayed sometimes at the Hall. On one occasion she had chosen deliberately not to meet him. She had, in an agonizing access of shyness at the thought of seeing him again, given up one of those wonderful monthly visits of hers. That had been

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

about eighteen months before this, when she had only been to the Hall a few times. Having heard that he was staying there, she had said she did not want to go that day. That was all. Scrupulously honest, and unversed in the art of useful fibbing, she could frame no excuse. But the conflict between her longing to go, her longing to see him, and her shyness made her pale enough to render further excuse unnecessary. Susan sent word that she was not very well.

And now she had met—had spoken to him again! He did not remember her. Why should he?

At nineteen Audrey was of medium height and very slim. Her face was small and soft, and looked a little delicate. Her features were irregular and of no particular beauty, except her eyes, which were very beautiful. It was a gentle little face; a trifle wistful in repose, but with a habit of brightening suddenly that was very attractive. Her hair was another beauty; it was a ruddy brown in color, soft and thick, with a loose wave running through it. She wore it turned back from her forehead and dressed simply in the nape of her neck, it having risen to the glory of being “done up” only within the last few months.

Susan allowed no fripperies. Audrey's frocks and hats, made and trimmed by herself, were of a Quakerish simplicity. But, to Susan's mingled pride and disapprobation, she never looked dowdy. Her feminine instinct had profited by her observation of Marcia's gowns, of her way of wearing them. Audrey possessed the gift of knowing how to put on her clothes; there was cunning in her small fingers. Susan eyed uneasily the unmistakable “air,” as Amelia called it, that there was about the child, but it was an intangibility to which she could hardly make ob-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

jection, and there was, besides, that covert pride that she could not stifle.

Audrey walked home through the spring-filled lanes, and concocted a dream conversation, wherein she said many smart things to Martin Jocelyn, and was altogether exceedingly cool and grown-up.

"That," said Audrey, "is how I will speak to him next time!"

CHAPTER XI

“DICKIE, did you break that vase?”

There was a gasp, a quiver, and, in the same breath, a wildly impulsive and frightened denial. Guilt was written quite plainly on the little, terrified face. Beyond that trembling “No,” Dickie took no means to hide her guilt. She stood and watched her mother with great, terrified eyes. A little spasm contracted Marcia’s mouth for a moment.

“Very well,” she said, quietly, and turned away to her writing-table.

For a minute there was silence in the room. Dickie did not move. She watched her mother as if fascinated. Marcia picked up her pen-holder and studied it. She put it down, and, without looking round, said, in the same quiet voice:

“Perhaps Euphemia knocked it down. Run away now, Dickie.”

Dickie tried to obey her. She moved one leg forward, then stood still again.

Marcia turned round, and met the child’s wide gaze.

“I think nurse might take you all to the White House farm to-day,” she said, pleasantly.

Dickie moved slowly down the long room. At the door she stood still. Marcia was watching her. Their eyes met.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Dickie was too young to understand the expression of hope in her mother's eyes; nor could she understand when, after a minute, she began to turn the door-handle, why the light in her mother's face was quenched suddenly.

When the child had gone, Marcia went slowly across to the mantel-shelf and stood there, very still, looking down into the fire.

Presently the door opened, and, hand-in-hand, in burst Jimmy and Tommy.

"Oh, Mother, isn't it quite too queer?" piped Jimmy, in an agitated little voice. "Dickie says she doesn't want to come to the farm!"

"She says she *won't*," annotated Tommy.

Marcia put out her hand and drew Jimmy to her.

"She need not go if she doesn't wish, sweetheart. Run and let nurse get you ready."

Jimmy seized her mother's hand and hugged it up to her cheek.

"I'm shockingly worried, dearest," she sighed.

"Oh, shocking!" supplemented her echo, big-eyed.

"Dickie chooses to stay at home," Marcia reminded them, with a trace of coldness in her tone.

"But—but how *queer*, dearest."

"Well, I want to write now, Jimmy. Tell Dickie she need not go." She bent and kissed them. "And tell nurse to put on your white flannel suits—the wind is quite cold."

They turned and left the room.

Marcia heard them laughing and talking with their father in the hall; heard him going up-stairs with them. Presently he came into the room.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Idle at ten o'clock in the morning!" he ejaculated, raising his eyebrows.

She sighed.

"I've just failed Jimmy and Tommy horribly," she said.

"You?"

She smiled an oddly shy little smile of pleasure at the incredulity in his tone.

"I have," she reasserted. "Dick, did you go into the nursery just now?"

"Yes."

"Well, did you notice Dickie?"

"Yes. They're all noticing her. I don't think she's well, poor little soul. It appears she doesn't want to go to the White House farm. Jimmy and Tommy are holding forth new-laid eggs and fresh-borned calves and lambs as inducements, but she won't go, and she looks queer."

"It's her conscience, not her body, that is troubling her. She told me a falsehood just now."

He glanced at her quickly. "A bad one?"

Her lips tightened. "All falsehoods are bad."

There was a little silence.

"She told it on the spur of the moment," Marcia said, picking up her pen again, "before she had time to think—her nervous timidity frightened it out of her. She will suffer terribly for it, poor mite."

Dick looked wretched.

"Couldn't you have a talk with her?"

"She will have to tell me the truth first," Marcia said, firmly.

Dick rubbed his aristocratic-looking nose, but said nothing.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I haven't written those letters for you yet," she said, in a lighter tone. "I won't be long."

"No hurry," he said, and went out.

The children came in to say good-bye.

Bobbie stood at Marcia's knee and began to sing.

"Come along, Bobbie," Jimmy and Tommy besought from the doorway. "Oh, *do* come!"

"Bob goin' to finiff song to Mummy," Bobbie interrupted her singing to say with great dignity, then resumed—

*"Lon' may he liver reign—
Dud save our King! Amen."*

When they had gone Marcia wrote assiduously, but every now and then she glanced swiftly at the clock, and she was restless. After awhile she rose and went up to the nursery; she opened the door and looked in.

A maid sat by one of the windows sewing. A white Persian cat lay in a patch of sunlight blinking sleepily. Over on the farther window-seat Dickie sat, huddled up, a forlorn white bundle.

"Madeline!"

Dickie started nervously, and looked round.

"Yes, mother?"

"Would you like to come and sit down-stairs with me?"

"No, thank you."

She turned her head away, and looked out of the window again.

"I don't think she's very well this morning, ma'am," the maid said, in a low voice. "She's that quiet and won't play with any of her toys—"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Very well. You may go now, Ellen."

The maid gathered up her work and left the room. There was a little silence; then presently a voice, soft, irresistible. "Dickie, why don't you want to come downstairs with me?"

A pause; then a sudden, wild outburst of stormy sobs.

"I—I—oh, you won't ever love me any more! If—if you knew—you wouldn't—ask me to—come down—"

"Tell me, Dickie. Perhaps I guess."

She did not touch the child: she stood waiting.

"Oh, no, no! Else you—you—wouldn't—have me—near—you!"

"Dickie, be brave." The soft voice was very persuasive.

"Mummy—oh, Mummy—I—I told a—story—"

"What was it, Dickie?"

"I—I broke the vase!"

Then at last, and with a long sigh of relief, Marcia's arms went round the soft little body.

"Darling, don't cry so! See, I love you still. You have been brave now, and confessed—"

Presently the sobs ceased; she gave a little shudder, and looked up piteously into her mother's face.

"Dickie, what made you do it? Are you afraid of me?"

The poor little tear-stained face crinkled up in weary wonder. "I don't know, Mummy! I—I just—it just came out—some way—oh, Mother, I am such a very horrid little girl! I—I wish I was some one else."

"No, sweet, you must just be yourself, and make yourself brave and true *always*."

After awhile, with a flush of deep shame, "You—you won't ever—chust me—again," quavered out wretchedly.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I shall trust you always, Dickie"—there was a tiny pause—"unless you tell me I have been wrong"—inexorably.

"But—but"—Dickie leaned her head tiredly against Marcia's shoulder—"stories are—are ter'ibly wicked, aren't they?"

"Yes, Dickie."

"You—you think a little girl that tells stories—is—is—*awful* bad?"

"Yes, Dickie."

A shiver went through the slim body.

"But I think"—the voice was low and soft—"a little girl who has told one story—"

"There—there was the others." The words dragged out slowly, painfully, with the queer insistent honesty that was part of Dickie when she was herself.

"Well, then, a little girl who has told three stories, and has been brave enough to confess, will never tell another, and so she isn't a little girl that tells stories at all!"

"Oh, Mother!" Dickie clung to her.

"She is a truthful little girl who can't bear stories. She thinks they are mean and bad, doesn't she, Dickie?"

"Oh, *awful* mean and bad, Mother."

The nursery cat rose and stepped daintily across the floor to them. He jumped up onto the window-seat, and rubbed himself against Madeline's arm.

"Mr. Jinks wouldn't *spea*k to me—before," she whispered, shamefacedly, "and he's purring *very* loud now."

Presently a tentative little voice broke the silence.

"Mother, are you—quite—*puffe*ckly sure you'll chust me another time?"

"Dickie, I shall never remember that you told this story. I shall trust you exactly as I trust Gwendoline—as I trust

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

your father—as I trust every one who is true and brave.”

Dickie gave a little tired sigh of relief. Presently she fell asleep.

Marcia rose and carried her into her bedroom, and laid her on the bed. Dickie stirred, but did not wake. Lying there, her face pale and tear-stained, there was a fragile delicacy about her that tugged at Marcia's heart. She turned away and went down to the study, where Dick sat immersed in work.

“Dick, I want you a minute.”

“Yes, dear?” He put down his pen and rose.

A warm smile touched her eyes, her lips.

“You're very good,” she said, simply. “Do you mind leaving your work for a minute?”

“Not for you,” he said, gallantly.

“I want you”—her face lit humorously—“I want you to come into the morning-room and smash something.”

“Eh? Oh, certainly. But in cold blood— Can't I get warmed up some way first?”

“Have you read Harrod's speech at Birmingham yet?”

“No. Hadn't time. Will that warm me up?”

She nodded, and, picking up a newspaper, handed it to him.

He began to read, smilingly; the smile died; he frowned.

“Fool!” he muttered. “Snob!”

Presently he flung the paper down.

“Good heavens, what a paltry snob the man is! Can't you see it all through? And the worst of it is he has a certain plausibility—”

“Oh, he's well oiled,” she agreed.

He glanced at her with an appreciative chuckle.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Now come—while you're warm," she said. "You can fancy the vase is Harrod's head."

"All right." He opened the door for her. "But why this wanton smashing of furniture?"

"I want to show Dickie that I trust her. She has confessed. She—oh, she suffered horribly. I shall manage so that she is alone in the room, do you see? And I shall ask her— Later you must come in and mention that you broke it. Do you see?"

He nodded, and followed her into the morning-room.

"What shall I smash?" he queried. "I say, Marcia, it's in a good cause, you know! Shall we sacrifice Aunt Mary's china dog?"

"Oh, Dick, what a brilliant idea!"

"Where did you hide it last, my dear?"

"There, behind that bowl—I can see his horrid yellow tail sticking out."

He pulled the creature out, and eyed its smug face with some satisfaction.

"Edward Henry Harrod, I hurl you to destruction!"

There was a crash, and the dog had vanished into a hundred bits of gorgeous yellow china.

"*What* a baby you are," Marcia laughed. "You know you did get some enjoyment out of the Edward Henry Harrod idea! Don't deny it. And now I really will finish those letters for you. I've only two left to do. I'll let you know when I want you."

A little later, when she looked into the bedroom again, she found Dickie awake.

"Come, sweet. I'm writing in the morning-room."

On the stairs she paused. She put her hand on Dickie's silky head.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"You go down into the morning-room, Dickie. I will be with you presently."

She watched the child trot down the stairs and turn into the morning-room with a curious expression on her face. Then she followed her, but in the hall turned aside and entered Dick's study.

"Dick, will you come into the morning-room in about ten minutes' time, and mention casually that you broke the dog? I have sent Dickie in alone."

"All right, my dear." He glanced at her doubtfully. "Isn't it rather—drastic?"

She smiled rather wearily.

"Yes. Falsehood requires drastic measures. And the reward, Dick!"

She hurried into the hall.

In the morning-room Dickie stood by the fireplace, horrified into muteness, her eyes fixed on the fragments of Edward Henry Harrod. Marcia had given her those extra minutes of anguish, had given them deliberately, and it had cost her a great deal.

She came in, crunched unflinchingly a piece of china beneath her foot, looked down.

"Why, it is Aunt Mary's dog! Did you break it, Dickie?"

Dickie's mouth opened, but no sound came; she tried again.

"N-no."

"Perhaps the wind blew it down."

"I—I—oh, Mummy, I *didn't*—truly, really I didn't—oh, I *didn't* break it!"

Marcia broke in on the frantic little voice.

"Why, what is the matter, Dickie? Of course you

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

didn't, since you say so. Come and sit on my lap, sweet."

Dickie ran at her with a queer little cry.

"Oh, Mother, I just 'dore you—so—so I can't breathe!"

Marcia picked her up with a sudden warm closing of her arms about her. She began to talk about a forthcoming picnic. Presently the door opened and Dick came in.

"Hulloa, chick, so you stayed at home to be cuddled, did you? By the way, Marcia, I smashed that beautiful china dog. Don't scold me!"

Dickie gave a sudden shrill burst of laughter and butted her head into Marcia's shoulder.

"Oh, naughty daddy!" she cried, excitedly.

He stooped and took her up into his arms.

"Unkind Dickie!"

She flung her arms round his neck.

"I didn't mean it, Dad! Oh, I really-truly didn't!"

That night Marcia sat thoughtful; she was pondering upon a fervent whisper that had accompanied Dickie's good-night:

"Oh, Mother, what would I do if I had Audrey's mother for a mother 'stead of you?"

CHAPTER XII

“PHŒBE! Phœbe! And who the deuce may she be?” quoted Martin, lazily. He pulled Euphemia’s silky ear. “Phemie! Phemie! Who the deuce shall I deem ye?” He rolled over on the lawn and looked up into Marcia’s face. “Did you hear that? I’m growing into a poet.”

Marcia looked up dreamily from her book.

“If ever anything could make you a poet, it would be this!” She waved her hand around, indicating more especially the lovely great bushes of lilac—white, purple, palest mauve.

“Your tone is sceptical, Marcia, which is unkind. If anything could have made me a poet, it would have been you.”

“I’ve heard that before.”

“Lately?”

“Yes, quite lately.”

He sat up.

“Then I consider it my duty to tell Dick.”

“Oh, he’s the worst of them all.”

“Really? How disgraceful! Your own husband, Marcia! Can’t you get a divorce?”

“The energy and perseverance of my youngest-born,” said Marcia, amusedly, “give promise of great achievements in the future.”

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

A few yards away, Bobbie, in a pink smock, was trying to stand upon her head. She had been trying for a good while, and each endeavor ended in a soft and solid thud; whereupon she lay where she had fallen, and her laughter pealed out—shrill, baby laughter, that found exquisite fun in the situation.

Every now and then Euphemia waddled off after a fat, kicking leg, which caused more laughter.

Euphemia was a dog. Beyond that indisputable fact no one ventured to label her. She had appeared at the Hall; on the occasion of her appearance she had seemed to look upon Jimmy as her mistress. That was all that was known to the elders about the matter. Other animals had appeared in similar manner on different occasions.

Among Marcia's firm theories anent the up-bringing of children was the imperative necessity of inculcating a love for all animals, and a gentle treatment of them. So that when some animal with a vivid claim to protection—such as a tin can tied to his tail, or an ostentatious display of ribs, or a neglected skin disease—appeared at the Hall, she could not very well turn it away. So she argued to Dick, her soft heart taking refuge in that convenient inculcation in her children of a proper love for all animals. But the animal was relegated, on these occasions, to the stables.

And it was on this matter that Euphemia at once showed her superior intelligence. Euphemia refused to be relegated to the stables. At that time, on the occasion of her first appearance, she had been a forlorn but intensely picturesque puppy. That she was also exceedingly dirty in no way detracted from her charm; it merely added the necessary touch of pathos. Washed, brushed, combed till she was limp with terror at the awful experiences through

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

which she was passing, Euphemia still possessed sufficient strength of will to crawl trembling back into the house and up to Jimmy's bed, where she passed a most comfortable night. And there she passed the succeeding nights.

Euphemia refused to be a stable dog, so she became a member of the household. Now at the age of four years she was undeniably stout, and she continued to grow stouter. In vain was she dieted; in vain was she exercised; her body seemed to grow steadily larger, just as her head seemed to grow smaller. She had beautiful brown eyes, with black smudges round them; long silky ears, a silky fawn coat, and a wondrous feathered tail that further mystified such as were bold enough to endeavor to trace her ancestry. The only certain conclusion at which any one ever arrived was that there was bad blood in her family tree on one side, or more probably on both. For Euphemia was possessed of no morals: she stole, she poached, she chased sheep and cows, and she cajoled to such a diabolical extent that all her misdemeanors were forgiven, and she was spoiled by every one. She possessed the artful and eminently useful faculty of convincing every one that her latest transgression was her last. No one, seeing her abject misery, her cringing repentance, could doubt it. No one ever did. Beaten, she collapsed, before the first stroke fell, into a soft little limp bundle of horrible woe. Scolded, her liquid eyes, her eloquent tail, both expressive of frightened adoration, stopped the cruel words that so evidently hurt overmuch. And so Euphemia went on her wicked way. She lorded it triumphantly over the two beautiful pointers; she never was abashed by the contrast between their slim grace and her own rotundity.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

The nursery cat left her severely alone, giving up with dignity the best place on the rug before the fire—a fact which surprised everybody, and the riddle of which was never unravelled. Whether there had been on some occasion a fight in which Euphemia had come off victorious, no one knew. But as Euphemia was an arrant little coward, who fled screaming if a dog so much as touched her, it did not seem likely. Most probably her cajolery had touched even the self-contained heart of the nursery cat, as it touched every one's else, and the best place on the rug was the result.

Bobbie, somewhat breathless from her exertions, lay, her head under a leg, and sang:

*“God save our g’acious King;
Long may he liver reign—
God save our King!”*

The breeze whispered among the lilacs; the scent of it was wafted to the warm lawn. . . .

“Phœbe! Phœbe! Who the deuce may she be?” murmured Martin, sleepily.

“Mummy! Mummy!” Over the lawn, hand-in-hand, the three of them came. “Mother, isn’t it an *exquisite* day for a picnic?”

“Why, dears, so it is!”

Squeals of delight.

“And we needn’t have nurses or Jenkins or any one,” further unfolded Jimmy. “Martin can carry the things.”

“Thanks, sweet coz.”

“Gorston woods! Gorston woods!” piped Dickie.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Come on, boys, let's go and tell cook!"

"She's in a most beastly temper," Tommy reminded Jimmy, sadly.

Jimmy paused.

"She isn't cross with *you*, Cousin Martin," she said, suggestively.

"I always had a weakness for cooks," Martin observed. "Lead on, boys!"

As they vanished, Bobbie, right way up from an unsuccessful somersault, called out:

"Bob's comin' too! I say, ole Martin, wait for Bob!"

She trotted after them, her pink cotton frock rumped up round her waist, her fat legs scurrying. Round to Marcia came a roguish blue eye—"Candy-peel—raisins—strawbelly jam!" And she fled, squealing with glee.

Marcia sat on reading.

After awhile they came back.

"Over the wall we saw Audrey, and we asked her to come too, and she's coming, if her mother will let her."

At half-past two Audrey appeared; she was always punctual. They were nearly ready, all except Marcia. She came to Audrey.

"Do you mind going on with them first, dear? Dick wants me. I will come on as soon as possible."

Audrey minded a good deal, but she had advanced sufficiently in her social training to manage to hide that she minded. They started without Marcia.

Euphemia went too, against Marcia's advice. Every one agreed implicitly with every objection she raised. She pointed out that the way to Gorston woods lay past several farms; that farms were to Euphemia merely glorious op-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

portunities for the exercise of all her bad habits. Every one knew it.

Martin went so far as to say: "I think we had better leave her behind."

And Euphemia was hurt to what, judging by her eyes, you would have deemed her very soul. The reproach in them made Dickie call out in anguish:

"Love, love, you *may* come! Oh, mayn't she?"

But Euphemia wasted no cajolery on her; Euphemia never wasted her arts. Without hesitation she crossed over to Audrey, and it was against Audrey's knee that the silky head was pressed, it was up to Audrey's face that the beautiful eyes gazed, and Audrey said, weakly:

"I think she will be good to-day, don't you?"

"All right!" Martin agreed at once. "Come along, Phemie."

So Euphemia went along. Before the afternoon was over every one hated her. Euphemia was used to these evanescent hatreds, which never disturbed her in the least, since they only lasted just so long as she willed. She chased fowls, while the human beings chased her; she barked at sheep and cows, and was several times apparently in the jaws of death; she took a bath in a ditch of liquid mud; she sat down to rest on the railway line, with a train in the near distance. All of which brought terror to, at least, Audrey and Dickie. The others regarded her various performances more with anger than fear.

"She shall *never* come with us again!" Jimmy declared, and Euphemia surely smiled.

Outside the woods, as a grand finale, she escaped from Jimmy's hold and tore into the middle of the road just in front of a motor-car bearing down on her at a rate of forty

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

miles an hour. Jimmy hurled herself after her; Audrey made wild snatches at various frocks; Martin went for Jimmy; there was a confused babel of motor-hoots, shouting, squeals, and barks, and then—a smell of petrol, and peace. Audrey said:

“One—two—three—four—” and looked very pale.

Euphemia sat beneath the hedge on the opposite side of the road, tongue lolling, the veins prominent on her nose, her eyes half closed.

Martin shook Jimmy’s shoulder quite roughly.

“Little fool, to rush out like that!” he ejaculated.

“Martin, I rushed too!” put in Tommy, in an injured voice.

Martin was looking at Audrey. He said, gently:

“You were frightened. I’m so sorry.”

She smiled valiantly.

“‘Phœbe! Phœbe! And who—’” he muttered. Then suddenly: “Why, I remember! You are Audrey! Audrey!”

“Considering that you hear the children calling me that every minute, I don’t see what there is to be surprised about,” she said.

He was holding out his hand, smiling down at her.

“I *couldn’t* think why your face was so familiar to me! Do shake hands again, won’t you? You don’t remember me—I’m the chap—”

“I remember you quite well.”

“Oh, you do, do you?” He looked at her with deep reproach. “And you never said anything! And we were such friends, too.”

She gave a little laugh.

“Not ‘*such*,’ I think.”

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I was," he declared, with vagueness, but fervor. "I remember you quite well now. You laughed in church because a wasp buzzed round the old rector's head."

"It was a blue-bottle."

"Oh yes, so it was. And you wore your hair in two long pig-tails, didn't you? Tied with blue ribbons," he said, tenderly.

"They were never tied with any ribbon at all!"

"Well, then, they ought to have been!"

"Have you found a place to have tea, Jimmy?" Audrey called to a pink frock that glimmered through the trees.

An ecstatic voice replied:

"A veritous Garden of Eden, dear!"

Another voice amplified the idea.

"Oh, what fun! Audrey and Martin are Adam and Eve, and we're all their little Cains and Abels and things!"

"If the Professor were here he could be the Devil," added Jimmy.

Professor Forbes was an elderly neighbor. He was, above and beyond and before that, a man of science. He spent most of his time in his laboratory; but when not there he was one of those tiresome people who are invariably where they are not wanted. He possessed, according to the young Barringtons way of thinking, no code of honor: he told tales, he was irritable, and he was mean. He had a little wife who generally wore a flurried air, and always a sad one, as if the years had proved lean to her, the honor of being wedded to a clever man having failed to make them fat. She was a slave to him, and after all these long years of disillusionment, still admired him. For her the boys had an affection which expressed itself

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

chiefly in various ingenious devices concocted with a view to worry her learned husband.

That picnic was a great success.

Euphemia in disgrace, proving too harrowing to every one's feelings, was forgiven. She was also fed with surreptitious pieces of cake. No one approved of this promiscuous form of feeding. They all agreed that, in the face of her growing stoutness, she must be fed only at stated intervals; and, with guilty head averted, with hand hidden beneath the cloth, or secreted behind backs, they fed her with pieces of cake.

And that was the sort of dog Euphemia was.

On the way home they met Dr. Lawson. Having extricated Euphemia from beneath his pony's hoofs, they gave attention to what he was saying.

"Miss Fielding, I have just come from your house. Your mother called me in as I was passing, as Miss Harris seemed so unwell. She is suffering from an attack of influenza—not, at present, a severe attack, I am glad to say."

"Poor Amelia, she hasn't felt well for the last few days."

"No, I dare say not. Your mother is anxious about you. She will not allow you to go into the sick-room. But there is no cause for anxiety. I hope you will not be nervous—"

"Oh no!" she put in, amused.

"Well, your mother is, on your account," he said, testily. "She would doubtless prefer you not to enter the house! Good-afternoon."

"Audrey," Marcia said, "you must come and stay with us."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Oh!" Over Audrey's face gleamed joyous acquiescence, then the light faded.

"I must help mother," she said, sadly.

"Phœbe! Phœbe!" You've not altered a bit," suddenly declared Martin. "Only then it was spelling, now it's nursing Matilda. Are you always doing your duty, Miss Fielding?"

"We'll see about whether she is to do it now," Marcia said. "Martin, you go home with the children. I am going with Audrey to see her mother."

"Hadn't we better all come?" he suggested. "I'm very persuasive!"

"I would pertickly like to see a person with influenza," Jimmy observed, ingratiatingly.

"Well, you won't do it now, sweet. Go with Martin."

"Mummy, I want to sing 'Rule Britannia.'"

"Not now, Bobbie!"

They parted.

Audrey, looking round, saw a fat and disgusted Bobbie pinching Martin's legs.

She walked the hot road, and fought piteously with herself. As they turned the corner, she evolved a firm:

"Please don't be angry, but—but please don't come any farther!"

Marcia smiled gently; she was not at all surprised.

"Audrey," she said, "do you know what it is that so often makes unselfish people tiresome? Well, it's because they will persist in making martyrs of themselves when their martyrdom can do no good to any one."

Audrey pondered it gravely.

"But there will be only mother to do everything, you see."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"And why not? There will be very little nursing. She is strong. As she is nervous about you, you would merely be an additional worry to her. My dear, you want to come to us, and so you think you ought not. There it is in a nutshell. It is merely a case of bad sight: you see all the desirable things of this world small and afar off, while all the undesirable things loom large and close. I'm going to see if I cannot turn oculist for the nonce, and cure you."

Audrey laughed softly.

"I'm afraid I see the nice things only too well."

"If you were not so charming, you would be a little prig, my dear. There is your mother at the gate!"

As they drew near, Susan retreated.

Audrey went forward.

"Mother, she isn't worse?"

"Don't come closer. No, she is no worse. Good-after-noon, Mrs. Barrington."

Marcia explained the object of her visit.

Susan listened in silence. A slow, painful flush crept over her face; once she turned her eyes, with a curious flash, almost of fierceness, on Audrey's face; then she looked out straight before her again. A queer silence settled on the little group. Audrey moved a step closer; her mother stepped back. "Didn't I tell you not to come near?"

"But, Mother, it isn't infectious. Dr. Lawson says it isn't."

Unreasoning contempt curled Susan's lip.

"Doctors don't know everything," she said.

Audrey looked towards Marcia.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Then—the children—I have been with Amelia to-day—"

"I am not afraid," Marcia said, gently. She forebore to uphold the doctor's words, seeing that it would be useless.

"If I let you go—" Susan turned to Marcia and said: "Will you promise to let me know at once if she feels ill?"

"Yes," Marcia answered.

"I am all right, Mother, and—couldn't I help you if I stayed here? You will be all alone—"

"If you stayed I would never let you come near me or Amelia." Her tone was inexorable.

Audrey was to have her heart's desire. Yet so soft was that heart that when presently she turned away with Marcia, all joy had for the present departed from her; and all because her mother, standing in the doorway, looked small and forlorn.

CHAPTER XIII

"**T**HAT child," observed Marcia, amusedly, "is developing."

Under the beech-tree on the lawn, in a nest of cushions, Audrey sat reading. Beside her, in another chair, Martin sat, doing nothing.

Martin was obviously disconsolate. He had spent the last half hour in reminiscences, over which he was invariably pulled up short with some gentle correction.

"You were kind in those days," he observed now, still reckless. "A kind little fairy all in white—"

"I never wore white frocks because they get dirty so soon."

Pause.

"I hated going off like that without saying good-bye," he essayed then, and there was a note of triumph in his voice.

Those soft hazel eyes were raised from the book. "*Didn't* you say good-bye?"

Martin was indignant, most righteously indignant.

"Didn't you notice that? Why, I worried over it ridiculously! I was called away suddenly—the governor had an attack of dyspepsia and wanted some one to swear at. I had to go. I was simply obliged to go."

His tone indicated that nothing less than his father's

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

commands would have dragged him away from the little girl who had laughed in church.

Audrey returned to her book.

He rose.

"I'm evidently not wanted," he declared, and strode away across the lawn.

When the last bit of him had disappeared behind the rhododendrons Audrey put down her book. She lay back in her chair and smiled softly; her cheeks were flushed a delicate pink, her eyes were very bright; the smile had something new about it. Audrey was enjoying herself immensely. She was certainly developing, and in the most unexpected way. So she sat and dreamed.

Jimmy came softly across the lawn and flopped down beside her. Her face was exquisitely saintlike. She said, gently:

"Dearest, I've been saying my prayers in the garden."

"Have you, dear?"

"You see, it really is so *very* beautiful. I knelt down under the big old laburnum-tree, and said them there."

Audrey's face had changed; it was serious now, and very tender. She stroked Jimmy's silky head.

"First I prayed thanks to God for giving me Mother." The adoration in her beautiful little face made Audrey's heart ache.

"I thanked Him over and over again," she pursued, in her soft voice, "and then I begged Him to strike the Professor dead."

"Jimmy!"

She looked up at Audrey innocently.

"What, dearest?"

"You are a very wicked, cruel little girl, Gwendoline!"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Oh no!" She looked quite shocked. "I said, 'Please God, when the Professor is mixing two stinks, let them explode and strike him dead.' And I said, 'Let it be on the spot, oh Lord, so that he is dead without any fuss. Amen.'"

Audrey, in spite of being really shocked, wanted to laugh. She said, feebly:

"You mustn't say s-stinks, Jimmy."

"Martin does," calmly, "and 'smells' isn't near strong enough. Have you ever been in the cottage when he's doing camisoles?"

"Doing what?"

Jimmy's cheeks grew faintly pink.

"Camikals."

"Oh! No, I haven't."

"Well, you go, and you'll call them 'stinks,' too."

Audrey could see Euphemia behind the walnut-tree, busy on a bone. She was trying to regulate Euphemia's diet; she disapproved of the way she was spoiled. But she preferred some one else to carry her ideas into practice.

"Jimmy, please go and take that bone from Euphemia."

"Where? Oh!" She rose unwillingly, and made her way, sympathy for the gluttonous and probably lately thieving Euphemia in every lagging step. Euphemia snarled forth a torrent of low abuse, but she allowed Jimmy to take the bone from her. Jimmy threw it, with ostentatious care, into a laurel-bush close by; Euphemia trotted after it.

Audrey saw the manoeuvre, but said nothing, having earnestly decided to speak seriously to Jimmy on her wickedness.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Jimmy," she said, gravely, as she drew near again, "I am very sorry you prayed so wickedly. Do you know that you are a would-be murderess?"

"Really? Oh, how *lovely*! I must go and tell Tommy!" She was gone, across the lawn, a white and gold vision.

CHAPTER XIV

AMELIA lay in bed, the bedclothes pulled up beneath her chin, her terra-cotta-hued face mournful to the degree of ludicrousness. Five little screwed-up curl-papers sat along the top of her brow. At intervals she sniffed pathetically.

In the window Susan sat darning stockings.

"It seems like yesterday that I came walking up to this house just to—to see how you were getting on," Amelia said, suddenly.

The stocking which Susan was darning jerked on her hand. She glanced swiftly at Amelia's face.

"Nearly nineteen years ago," she said.

Amelia sniffed.

"Nineteen years! And I meant to stay an hour! Nineteen years of this lonely life! And me always so sociable. Life," said Amelia, "is very hard on us poor women."

Susan darned with an absence of her usual methodical care; she glanced up often at Amelia.

"You have had a comfortable home," she said, curtly.

"And why?" There was a sudden ugly snarl in Amelia's voice. "Why have you given me a home? Out of love for me? Oh yes, that's it! Out of love!"

A feverish spot of color burned on either cheek; the curl-papers trembled.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

The stocking dropped to Susan's lap; she stared into Amelia's excited face.

"What do—do—" she said, and she stopped, a queer look of fear shadowing her face.

Amelia heaved herself over onto her side, and buried her face in the pillow.

Slowly Susan took up the stocking and continued to darn.

Afterwards she unpicked the work that she did then.

Silence reigned in the room till Amelia asked:

"Is it time for the doctor yet?"

"He will be here in a quarter of an hour."

Amelia sat up hastily.

"He might be early. Give me the glass, Susan, quick!"

Susan rose with a slowness that subtly expressed contempt.

Amelia's hands, trembling with weakness and hurry, were fumbling at the curl-papers. Susan placed the mirror and brush and comb on the bed. Amelia picked up the glass and peered anxiously at her reflection.

"My eyes are scarcely inflamed at all now," she said, in a satisfied voice. "I really look almost myself again—except, perhaps, for a little delicacy."

She smiled complacently. Susan stood, staring down sombrely at her. Amelia did not notice her; she was busy pulling and twisting at her curls, studying the effect with her head first to one side and then the other. There was a certain pathos in such an exhibition of vanity, but it was lost on Susan; even her contempt had gone; in her eyes, staring down at Amelia, was only a certain searching intentness as if she were striving desperately to see into the small mind behind those poor little curls. Amelia glanced

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

up at last, as if impelled suddenly, and gave a cry; she dropped the comb, and huddled back on the pillow.

"Why do you stare at me like that? I—I haven't done anything—I mean—don't look at me like that!" She began to weep, holding the sheet up to her face. "I don't know what you mean—staring at me like that—you always were hard on me—" she whimpered.

Susan stepped back, she drew her hand across her eyes and spoke quickly: "Don't be foolish, Amelia! You are full of sick fancies."

"But you—you were staring funnily at me, just as if—as if you suspect me of—of something—I don't see why you should—I—"

Susan interrupted, her words jostling each other roughly. "Don't be ridiculous! I was looking at your hair. I was wondering whether you wouldn't look better with the curls a little looser."

A queer gleam of sardonic humor shone in her eyes for a moment; it was reflected in some of the lines round her mouth. But her words had the desired effect; they turned Amelia's thoughts into a new channel. She pushed away the sheet, her hand went up to her hair.

"Do you think so, Susan?" She sat up, and grasped the mirror again.

"I've spoilt myself now with crying," she said, tearfully. "I shall look my worst for the doctor!"

"It will wear off in a few minutes," Susan replied, with an unusual patience.

Amelia glanced up at her with a sly smile.

"A little—just a *little*—powder," she said, hesitatingly.

"There isn't such a thing in the house," Susan said, curtly.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Amelia opened her mouth, then shut it again. A vision of a little paper bag with powder in it, hidden away in a box in her room, dangled alluringly before her eyes; but her fear of Susan forbade mention of the secret hoard.

She lay back with a fretful sigh.

Susan took away the mirror, brush and comb, curl-papers.

"There's Dr. Lawson," she said, and left the room.

"Well, how is she getting on?" the doctor asked, as she opened the door to him.

"Very well, I think."

He nodded.

"There's a sharpness in the air this morning. Now let me think—ah, yes—it has struck me, Mrs. Fielding, to wonder whether our patient has anything on her mind?"

"No! She couldn't have!" Susan's denial came quickly, almost before he had finished speaking.

He looked at her with a certain disapproval.

"We are none in a position to make such emphatic statements about our fellow-mortals, Mrs. Fielding. The human mind is essentially—"

"How could she?" Susan broke in, unconscious of interruption. "She has lived here for nearly nineteen years. She is foolish—weak. She would never be able to keep anything to herself all that while." She spoke insistently, almost as if she were trying to convince, to bring reassurance to, herself, as well as to the doctor.

He waved his eye-glasses.

"But it isn't necessary that she should have had this trouble on her mind for such a length of time," he suggested, blandly.

Susan's eyelids blinked.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Of course not!" she said, sharply.

"Some little trouble; some—ah—feminine worry," he pursued. "I have seen it so often. The feminine mind, and more especially the sick feminine mind, is so apt to seize upon and nurse a trouble that in all probability has no substance, no practical reality." He had reached the sick-room; he entered with a professional smile, as cheerful as if he had come to dine.

"And how is our patient this morning?"

Presently Susan was obliged to leave the room in answer to a knock at the hall door; she went reluctantly.

Dr. Lawson turned at once to Amelia; he had a tremendous faith in himself, which was what had brought him to his present comfortable position, it being an enviable faculty to possess, and one that makes for success more surely than brains or plodding. He had decided that Amelia had something on her mind; it followed as a natural sequence that there could be no doubt that she had.

"Something is troubling you," he said, kindly.

Amelia's loose mouth worked.

"What should be? There's nothing, doctor! No, there isn't."

He patted her hand gently, and Amelia wept. She sobbed out incoherent sentences about a woman's heart, and always being timid, and Susan so hard, and, after all, what harm had she done? If all you heard was true she had done good, not harm. . . .

"Oh, doctor, you are a gentleman! I trust you!" exclaimed poor Amelia dramatically, if thickly, as Susan approached the room.

As Dr. Lawson drove away, he looked back at the sad

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

little gray house standing grimly alone at the top of the hill. "I really may say that I never make a mistake," he said.

From a window on the top floor a woman's strained eyes watched him drive away; her thin little hands made a wild gesture as if they would drag him back: a dry sob rattled in her throat

"I was—away—three minutes," Susan muttered to herself. She turned and stared wildly at Amelia, who lay with mouth open, asleep.

"She *could* not be *sure*," she said. She had said it many times during nineteen long years.

CHAPTER XV

“I AM so happy!”

Marcia smiled down at her.

“I don’t think any one can be so happy as I am,” Audrey went on, softly.

Beyond the long French windows the day was gray and cold; a sad, little, rain-swept world lay there; the rhododendrons’ delicate blossoms were crinkled and limp; the lilac-bushes bent beneath the heavy slanting rain. In the room—it was a long, narrow room—all wonderful yellows and white—a fire glowed in the grate, which Euphemia was convinced was there entirely for her benefit. She lay stretched at full length on the white fur rug, her head in dangerous proximity to the flames; at intervals she groaned because she was too hot, whereupon Audrey would put a shielding foot or hand between her head and the fire.

“When I was a little girl I used to try to walk and speak like you. Now I know no one in the whole world can ever do it till Jimmy grows up.”

Marcia laughed softly.

“You are the most wicked little flatterer, Audrey!”

Audrey nestled closer on the rug, resting her head against Marcia’s knee.

“Stroke my hair,” she said, coaxingly.

Presently:

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Wouldn't it have been terrible if you had had no children? I mean for them."

"Isn't that rather Irish, sweet?"

"I think the Irish can often express things better than we can. Mrs. Barrington?"

"Well, dear?"

Audrey was silent. Her natural reserve, strengthened by her up-bringing, often prevented her from saying what she wished to say, even to Marcia.

But Marcia waited; she knew how to wait.

Audrey, her hands clasped about her knees, gazed into the fire; the light caught the waves and ends of her hair till they glowed gold and red.

"I—I sometimes wonder—whether—whether mother would have been—happier—without me."

The small, hesitating voice ceased; Marcia read tragedy in it; she understood how these days spent at the Hall had fed the doubt.

She sat forward.

"You should not wonder that, Audrey," she said, gently. "It is morbid. Don't you know that your mother's love for you is a veritable passion?"

Audrey lifted a white face; tears filled her eyes suddenly; she did not speak.

"Dear, there are all sorts of mothers in the world," Marcia went on. "Just because I happen to be the sort who pets her children, you must not think that that is the only way of showing love. Audrey, your mother comes of a stern, a self-restrained, reserved family. Her very love for you makes her sterner—she is so afraid of spoiling you." She rose suddenly, and began walking up and down the room. "Audrey, when Jimmy was born—when

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

I held her and looked down at her little round head, her helpless body, her serious eyes—an instinct sprang to life in me—oh, so strong! The instinct to spoil her—to spare her—to do everything for her always.” She paused by a large palm, and broke off a dead leaf. “I fought it,” she said. “Oh, how I fought as the years slipped by! It is so horribly strong—that instinct! It is fostered, strengthened by the first weeks and months of the little helpless life when you *must* do everything. You see the result of it all round you—spoiled, selfish children, bored at ten years old! Oh, the pity of it! . . . I was spoiled like that!”

“Oh, no, no!” Audrey cried out.

Marcia smiled at her gently.

“You didn’t know me before I met Dick,” she said, simply.

There was a little silence. Then she went on speaking, a beautiful light in her face.

“How could I dare reckon on my children finding a love like his? On their loving so that they should know what it was to rejoice—to *rejoice* in giving up their will to another? How could I trust to that? I had to look forward, to prepare them to live without that, or to make them more worthy of it should it come, than I had been. I had to make them strong and brave and happy—to teach them to think sanely—to be unselfish, self-reliant. I want them to have beauty and love—to fill their childhood with that—to give them something that, no matter what their after life may be, shall always be precious to them. Women’s lives are so hard—sometimes. And sick minds make them so much harder than they need be. I think my children have healthy minds. I pray God that they may always have them.”

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She came back and sat down again by Audrey.

"Your mother had to fight like that, too, Audrey, and I think her very fear carried her too far in the other direction; it blinded her to the fact that every child has a nature, a disposition of her own. I wanted to bring up my children without their knowing what fear was. My methods answered with Jimmy and Tommy. They go to bed always without a light; they," with a whimsical smile, "make my life a thing of terror to me, because they do not know what fear is. Bobbie is the same. But my little Dickie is different. I have tried her without a light in her room, and she said nothing, but she suffered, and now she has a light. You were like that, and your mother is so different—I expect she thought it a weakness to be overcome. But timidity in some children is constitutional, and can only be coaxed out of them gradually, never driven."

Audrey sat thinking. Marcia was used to the queer, grave way she had of thinking out a subject; she forebore to interrupt her.

She spoke at last; the wide generosity that sweetened her nature shone in the eyes she lifted to Marcia's face.

"You have made me understand," she said. "My mother does love me, and oh, I love her!"

No memory of the agonies suffered in childhood, of the deprivations, the dulness of her life, marred the perfection of that minute. But Marcia, remembering, bent and kissed her, unable to speak.

"Audrey, I shall give a ball, and you shall be the queen of it! You shall come out at it."

Tea had just been brought in, and with it Dick had

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

appeared. He gave one of his big laughs at the ecstatic face Audrey turned to Marcia.

"A ball! A *ball!*"

Martin, strolling in, looked at her earnestly; he did not join in Dick's laughter.

"Will you dance the first with me?" he said. "And the supper dance, and three—four others?"

"Oh, I can't descend to the thought of mere mundane human partners yet," she returned, laughing. "What shall I wear?" She turned earnestly to Marcia.

"White *crêpe de chine* with pompons à la Empire, made with the new bolero and appliqués," said Martin, seriously.

The door was softly opened. Jimmy said from the hall:

"I know I mustn't come in unless I'm invited, but it's really *most* important!"

A chorus of invitation issued from the room. Jimmy appeared, walking softly—a chastened Jimmy. She made her way to her mother.

"Why, dear, you see—Martin, shut the door, please, else Tommy will come in—Mother, sweet, *do* you think the soldier who accepted the cup of cold water from Sir Philip Sydney was an awful *pig?*"

Martin, shutting the door, smiled.

"I've had my doubts of him, Jim!"

Jimmy's velvet-clad bosom heaved in a big sigh; she hung her head in thought, till her hair fell round her in a pale cloud of gold. Over her unconscious head Dick made grimaces to attract Marcia's attention to Jimmy's attitude.

Marcia's eyes twinkled.

"The absurdity of him!" she said to the fire.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Through the key-hole came an indignant whisper.

"I heard what Martin said! I *won't* be him. You've *always* said he was a most *tremenjous* pig!"

Jimmy turned to Dick.

"Dad, you're a married man, what do *you* think?"

"Let me hear the case, my dear," said Dick, judicially.

"You see, it's like this. I do so want to be Sir Philip Sydney all dying and wounded on the battle-field, but Tommy *won't* be the—the—"

"*Pig!*" from the hall.

"And Dickie," in a tone of intense wonder, "is down-stairs nursing cook's sister's baby! Mother, isn't she really *queer*?"

"How queer, old girl?" said Dick, with lazy enjoyment.

"A *baby*, dad! Not a puppy, or a foal, or even a *kitten*! Babies are so awfully silly. They can't even lick you, and they've no tails to wag, so that you can tell when they're pleased, and they are so perfectly hideous, and so *very* stupid, aren't they? They couldn't possibly run after a bit of string, or steal coal out of the coal-box, or eat your shoes, or do anything. Mother, was *I* ever *quite* so silly?"

"Quite, dearest."

"Jim," said Martin, "you're a horrid little New Woman! When you grow up you'll be clamoring and kicking for a vote!"

Jimmy looked thoughtful.

"I don't think I will, Martin. You see, if I went in for politics I should have to stay in town a good deal, and I mean to live in the country always; besides, I should hate to worry a bobby—I do so adore them. But my sympathism is with the women," very gravely. "I do think mother

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

ought to have a vote before old Silas Green, who is always drunk 'cept on funeral mornings."

"Hear! Hear!" said Dick. "Jim, come and give me a kiss!"

Jimmy, with her arms round his neck, cooed:

"Dear old dad! I wish there were more like you! The world would be a better place."

"Oh, she's delicious!" Audrey told Euphemia.

Martin sat down on the rug.

"I want to cuddle Euphemia, too," he said.

"I've thought of a way," said Jimmy, and slipped to the floor.

It was Dick who presently suggested a visit to the nursery to see how the difficulty had been overcome. They found the door ajar. Approaching noiselessly, they looked in. On the floor lay Jimmy; at the other end of the room Tommy sat, with ostentatious back turned to the room; beside Jimmy—they stared in horror—lay the stout and dignified Williamson! Williamson, the monument of respectability and decorum! Williamson, the old family butler, who had never been known to relax into a smile—to express by so much as one wince his realization of pins being dug into his beautiful calves; of jokes made at his expense; of placards bearing rude inscriptions and adorning his coat-tails! Williamson, who, beneath all these trials, and beneath, too, the fire of several pairs of wickedly expressive childish eyes, had poured out wine, had taken round plates, with never a blink of his immaculate eyelashes.

Audrey gasped. Dick was dumfounded. Martin whistled beneath his breath; and it was only Marcia who, smiling amusedly, whispered:

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I have had my suspicions of him!"

Jimmy waved a cup of water above her head.

"Take this water to him, his necessity is greater than mine!" quoth she, to an imaginary attendant; then, in an intense whisper: "Take it, Billy!"

She continued to wave the cup above his head, spilling a good deal of it. Williamson put up a hand and seized it. Then Jimmy proceeded to act a revised version of the old story, and one concocted on the spur of the moment by herself. Stretching out a long, slim leg, she gave Williamson an energetic kick upon his thigh; he bore it without a sign of movement.

"Pig! Wouldst thou drink the draught of a soldier's thirst? May the carrion-crows pick out thine eyes! May your little children be widows and fatherless, oh, faithless and selfish pig!"

Audrey turned and ran down the corridor.

"It—it was the thought—of—*Williamson!*" she gasped.

CHAPTER XVI

SHE tilted back her head and looked up at him seriously.

"I feel so good," she said.

He smiled.

"I want to be gooder," she added.

"You couldn't be," he promptly responded.

She tried to frown at the bunch of lilies-of-the-valley which she held, but she could not manage it.

"You are trite," she observed.

"There's often a lot of truth in truisms," he said; "and," he added, "they're safe."

"Safe?"

It was then that he failed to explain himself further; he often failed like that with Audrey.

She had a way of looking at him with wide-eyed innocence, a way of waiting gravely for his response that disconcerted him a little.

"I wonder would the world be a very wicked place if there were no spring?" she said.

"It does wash away the dirt a bit," he agreed, "but winter does it too, you know."

"Winter is very beautiful and grand, but don't you think it needs a stronger soul to stand its more drastic methods?"

He met her serious eyes and flushed boyishly.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I'm afraid I was thinking chiefly of the hunting," he said.

"Yes?"

"Why, you see, it's simply grand! It seems to me there's nothing will knock all the rubbish out of a chap like a good run, with a good mount under him. It's you and your horse together—he's as keen as you are—everyone's keen—it gets into your blood. Look at the hounds—it's a treat to see them. And you take all weathers and chances—you and your horse. Come home drenched, or come home dry, it's all one so long as you've had a good day. You feel pretty content with the world, you know, and all the cobwebs are bound to have been sent flying. That's what I was thinking of."

"I can't ride," she said, wistfully.

He paused on the path.

"I say, will you let me teach you?"

"Oh!" Her face kindled, then her shyness shadowed it. "No, thank you," she said.

"Do," he urged. "I'm sure you'd make a good rider. I always flatter myself I can tell."

"Do you think I would really?" she asked, eagerly.

He nodded.

"Sure of it. I'm never wrong. You could start on Robin; he's a quiet old soul."

Longing fought nervousness and a sensitive horror of publicity.

"I haven't a skirt."

"Oh, Marcia will rig you up something."

Martin bent his head and coaxed.

"I do want to teach you. If I could only make you understand what you miss by not being able to ride. It

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

beats everything in the world. It's worth the bumping it gives you at first."

She gathered confidence from his gay face.

"I—I know I shall be awfully silly, and a most horrible coward," she hesitated.

"Just at first you may feel scared," he said, in his kind voice. "But not after a bit. Will you come now?"

"Suppose when I'm on I—scream?"

He smiled down at her.

"Well, what if you do?"

"But suppose I'm so frightened that I only want to get off?"

"In that case it will be no good trying to make you into a horsewoman, that's all. No harm will have been done."

"Yes, there will," she said, a humorous twist to her mouth.

"What harm?"

"To my self-respect. And to your respect for me, and Mrs. Barrington's and 'the boys.'"

It was queer to see how at a loss he was; he made excuses for her.

"We can't all be alike," he said, lamely. "It isn't likely that just because any one happened to be nervous that way—"

She interrupted, laughing.

"Don't try to be kind. It's true that you'd none be able to understand it, and deep down there would be a tiny bit of 'despicion.' I like that word. I coined it," she added.

He took refuge in:

"You won't be nervous. I'm sure of it."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

But Audrey's heart was quaking when, a little later, he led Robin up to her. Never, never had horse surely been so tall! She stood close, obeying him, then looked up and up and up.

"He's a jolly little chap," Martin said, reassuringly. Little!

She strove to gain time by patting Robin's fat gray side, but Marcia, being wise, put in a quiet—

"She's ready, Martin."

Martin gave her his directions. Audrey followed them obediently.

"Now, when I say 'three'—spring," he said. "One—two—three!"

She sprang, and no one was more astonished than she was to find herself in the saddle.

"That's good," he said, encouragingly.

She smiled down at him—what a long way down it was!

He was showing her how to hold the reins. "Ridiculous little hands!" he said. "Now you shall walk round the field."

And in the next few minutes joy and a glad pride filled Audrey's heart. Frightened? Not she! Why, it was lovely, and so easy.

Marcia, following slowly, smiled, but kept silence. Ordinarily so modest, a wonderful certainty came to Audrey that she was one of those rare people, of whom she had heard, who are born riders; one of those people who require no teaching, who, at the first essay, ride as well as if they have always ridden. She was ridiculously happy. "Dear old Robin," she murmured.

"Will you try trotting now?" Martin asked.

"Oh yes," she said, joyously, and then—and then—

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Two minutes later Robin stood still. Audrey, through a haze of hair that curled and waved round her face, looked down abashed at Martin. She was very hot, very breathless, and very much ashamed. But she was not in the least nervous.

"That's a splendid start," he said, heartily.

"Please—don't be—so—ridiculous!" she panted, angrily.

"I'm serious," he told her, earnestly. "At least, you didn't come off. You were awfully game."

"Didn't it feel terrible?" Marcia had drawn near. "It's all bumping and jarring at present, but you wait."

Audrey was trying to coil up her hair with hot, fumbling hands.

"You shouldn't drop the reins like that," Martin chided her. "It doesn't matter with old Robin, but it's not right."

He was very serious, very much in earnest over her lesson.

"Plait your hair, and let it hang, dear," Marcia advised. Martin watched impatiently.

"Now, are you ready to start again?"

"Yes," she said. And off she went, with him running beside her, advising, explaining, keeping time.

Never in all her life had she felt so hot; never so miserably aware of her utter stupidity. But she would not give in.

Marcia was interested.

"I knew she had grit and an indomitable will under that soft little exterior. But, oh, won't she be stiff and aching to-morrow, poor child!"

But when at last Audrey dismounted she was smiling joyously. Aches and pains she could bear now with a

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

valiant spirit, for she had done it! For one blessed minute something miraculous had happened. That was all that she had known. The bumpings and screwings had ceased; a beautiful rhythmic sensation, and Martin's triumphant voice:

"You've got it! That's it!"

And then bumpings and screwings again, but beyond them a memory.

"I did it!" so she told Marcia.

She stood stroking Robin's nose; there seemed a new relation between them. Her pink face was radiant. "Dear, *dear* old Robin! How I've worried you and bumped you about! But I'll ride you some day, Robin! Oh, I love it!"

Martin stood by, looking down at her with a paternal air of pride. Audrey turned her head:

"Oh, *thank* you!" she said. "When will you let me try again?"

CHAPTER XVII

AUDREY laughed as she battled with the storm. Winter had descended with roarings of sleet-laden winds upon the world of delicate flowers and fragrances. It was the end of May according to the calendar; but the bitter east wind was colder, as it swept on its way with a ruthless grand ferocity, than it had been in December.

Red-cheeked, Audrey pushed on, fighting, with a new-born joy, the wind and the sleet. She seemed alone in the world when she had breasted the hill and stood looking about her. Once she had shrunk from that feeling of loneliness; the largeness of the world had frightened her when her own smallness, her insignificance, had been brought home too sharply to her. She had shrunk too from mighty storms. Nature in her big moods had alarmed her. But now a change had come over her. She gloried in the savage wind; the huge scurrying black clouds; she lifted her face to the spiteful sleet. Just as she had loved and revelled in the beautiful spring sweetness with a keener joy than ever before, so now she loved the storm, and was not afraid. At the top of the hill she could not keep her footing; she slipped her arm around the trunk of a shivering beech-tree, and so stood, panting. With her red cheeks, brilliant eyes, and smiling lips she looked a sprite of the storm; her joy made her a part of it; the very tendrils of her hair seemed to glow with that joy. It was

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

a new Audrey that Martin, pursuing at a discreet distance, came upon at the top of the hill.

She did not speak when he joined her; she gave him a smile and cuddled her arm tighter round the tree.

Presently he spoke.

"It will be dark before you can get back," he said, in a disapproving tone.

"Oh, isn't it grand!" With inconsequent joy she waved aside his disapproval.

He frowned.

"I think a frown rather suits you," she said, her head on one side.

He would not smile.

"You might walk into the pond at the foot of the hill in the dark," he said.

"But you think that we shall be safe, now that you are here?"

"Yes."

"That," she said, with a provokingly considering air, "is very interesting. You see, I have lived all my life within a few miles of this part, and you—well, say a few months altogether, yet *I* am to fall into that pond unless you are here to save me. Now, why shouldn't you fall into the pond?"

"I may. In that case I shall save you from the water, acting as the awful example . . ."

"But I might fall in first."

"Pardon, you couldn't. I shall lead."

"Oh, are we to walk home in single file? How dull! I can't talk to a person's back."

He smiled.

"I should have said my feet will lead. You see, when

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

we are shoulder to shoulder my feet must stick out a long way farther than yours, and when I feel the icy water nipping my big toe I'll holler."

"Poor old tree," she murmured, as she felt it shiver beneath the onslaught of the wind.

"Do you remember the day I helped you with your French lesson?" he said.

"French?" she answered. "Oh, I'm frozen. We'll go back."

Martin's expressive mouth showed amusement and a certain determination as he strode down the hill beside her.

She gave a gay little laugh.

"I'm being blown down," she called out, breathlessly.

The wind had grown stronger; it shrieked as it tore past them.

"Won't you hold my arm?" he shouted.

She shook her head.

Half-way down the hill there was a little copse. The trees were swaying and bending, but they were thick and snug, and Audrey, out of breath, ran in among them for shelter. She found a deep, dry ditch; its high bank kept the wind off, and, laughing, she took refuge there. The sudden warm stillness was startling after the clamor without. She gave a little snuggle into the bank.

"I want to purr," she said.

"We'll stay here till we thaw," he said. "Wait a bit; if I come that side I shall keep the wind off you. Is that better?"

"For me it is."

"Then it is for me. Miss Fielding?"

"Yes?"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Don't you remember that morning when I helped you with your French?"

"Oh, I remember something about some French. How it used to worry me! I wonder if French people would understand my French now? I would love to go to Paris. Talk to me about it."

"About our French lesson? Well, you couldn't get a sentence right, I remember—"

"I mean talk about Paris."

"Oh, do you? I'm sorry. What shall I say about it? It's gay and charming and beautiful, but give me dear old smoky London. I like to run over to Paris for a little while, now and then—oh, well, that isn't particularly interesting, is it? I'm afraid I'm no good as a guide to the beautiful city of Paris. Of course they'd understand your French. D'you remember 'J'aime mon frère'? You couldn't remember it, and you shed some tears over it. I tried to console you, and you threw your arms round my neck and declared that you loved me more than all the brothers in the world. Do you remember?"

"Yes, and you said I had ruined your collar!"

"What a young cub I was! How you used to hug in those days! Didn't you adore me?"

His eyes were twinkling.

"I believe I was very fond of you," she said, staidly. "Shall we go on now?"

He pulled out his watch.

"Five minutes more. You're not cold, are you?"

"Oh no! My cheeks are burning. It's coming into this warmth out of the wind."

"When you'd done hugging me, you said, 'Oh, Mr.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Jocelyn, I do think you are very handsome!" he pursued, gravely.

"I never knew your name," she said, coldly.

"Didn't you? By Jove, how remiss I was! And you said " (he went on, growing reckless by reason of his success): "When we grow up we'll be awful great friends.' Do you remember?"

"No," she said. "Neither do you."

"Have I only dreamed it? Was the wish father to the thought?"

"You made it up," she said, in a little disapproving way.

"I'm sorry," he said; "don't be cross."

Her expression altered; the Audrey of old days disappeared; she raised her eyebrows.

"It's hardly worth being cross about, is it? What a wonderfully good memory you must have, to remember such silly little trivial things."

"You remember them, too," he suggested.

"Do I? But you prompt me, you see. And the things that happen in one's childhood always stand out so clearly, don't they? I remember all sorts of utterly uninteresting things."

"Didn't you miss me at all when I went away?"

"Well, you see, I didn't know at first that you had gone—"

"And you weren't a bit glad to see me again after all these years?" he pleaded.

She remembered the suffering of that day which she had chosen to spend at home because he was staying at the Hall; she remembered the agonizing shyness of her meeting with him in the garden. Honestly she answered:

"No."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

He was silent.

Close beside her shoulder a late primrose stretched up, as if it would whisper in her ear; bending her head to it she dreamed. . . .

Warmth and sunshine all around—long ago a primrose had looked at her so—a little girl in an ugly gray frock—it had wondered at her daring then. Was this one wondering, too? And there was a blackbird with such a yellow beak—‘Do you know why blackbirds always wear their Sunday clothes, Audrey?’ A Panama pulled low over gay blue eyes—a little girl gazing adoringly at a square chin—the scent of the grass warm beneath the sun—somewhere a dog had barked—a happy sort of bark, as if he had to express his exuberance somehow—and always the primrose had watched. . . .

She looked at him with the dream still in her eyes. He saw it, and his thoughts leaped back again.

“Audrey,” he said, softly.

She turned and stroked the primrose gently. There were a few others round them—little pale things left in a world of dead brethren, cowering among the kindly brown bracken: the bracken was sheltering them, just as Martin was sheltering her.

“After all,” he said, “we *were* friends long ago.”

“Yes.”

“Then you’re not very kind to me, are you?”

Her clear eyes met his thoughtfully; she pondered the question gravely.

“Have I been unkind?” she asked, seriously. “I didn’t know.”

He had not expected her to take his words like that. Looking down at her, his face grew very tender: for the

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

minute she seemed to him to be the earnest little Audrey of nine years ago.

"There is no earthly reason why you should be kind to me," he said. "I merely met you a few times, and thought you a dear quaint little kiddie. Then I had to go away. I was sorry I couldn't say good-bye—for a few minutes," her childlike honesty impelled him to tell the truth. "Then I forgot all about you."

She stood looking out straight before her. She was worried. Knowledge was stirring within her. Guiltily she knew what had made her unkind to him, and to her it seemed that now she must tell him.

"I've bothered you now," he said, boyishly. "Be as unkind to me as you like! But I'll make us be friends some day! Shall I pick you these last prim-roses?"

"No; they'd be so cold all the way to the Hall."

"I'm afraid we must start."

She turned and looked up at him.

"I want to tell you why I wasn't kinder, or more pleased to know you again," she said, simply. "You see, when I was a child I was very lonely. And I made a hero of you. You never guessed what you meant to me. When I heard you were gone it nearly broke my heart, I think. Children take things so tragically, and I had no one young—and you had been so kind. For months I waited and watched for you to come back. For years I clung to the belief that you would come some day. But, naturally enough, you had forgotten the stray child whom you had helped with her lessons." She paused.

He opened his mouth, then shut it without saying anything. He could not make excuses, could not tell a half-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

truth to her: she was so intensely straightforward, so young and simple about it.

"When you came back, I—" For the first time she found it difficult to explain. "You see, I meet very few people, and you had been—had been such a hero—I was nervous, and then I—I think—it was very silly and petty—I wasn't really cross," she hung her head now, and her cheeks were red: involuntarily he looked for the long pig-tails of old. "But I think I—I was trying to have a silly little revenge."

The last words were so low that he had to bend his head to catch them. He smiled down at her.

"You see, it was—because—"

He cut the halting words short. He said, very gently:

"I think I understand, and I think it was just splendid of you to tell me! It's no good saying now that I can't understand how I went away and forgot you like that. Boys are such careless brutes! If I'd known you cared at all, I'd never have done it. You won't punish me any more, will you?"

She lifted her head and laughed shyly.

"But you mustn't pretend to remember things!"

"Never again! Honest Ingin! Will you shake hands?"

She gave him her hand.

"It's never grown," he said.

She turned back when they were going, and picked the primrose that had stretched up towards her ear.

"I want just that one," she said.

CHAPTER XVIII

AUDREY sat and read.

Dotted about the orchard, Jimmy and Tommy and Dickie read too. Under the big apple-tree, Bobbie and Euphemia lay fast asleep. Audrey put down her book, and began to think.

There was something of the Puritan in her in spite of her mother's doubts about it, and her up-bringing had fostered it. The beauty and happiness about her now almost hurt in the intensity that they had lately taken upon themselves. And she sometimes grew frightened without knowing why. Her nature had been starved of so much that most girls accept without thought and as their due, that it received all new impressions with a vivid sensitiveness that gave them perhaps an added beauty, but also a certain almost painful poignancy.

And Audrey found that now, for some subtle reason, she could not talk about it to Marcia. . . .

She was so happy! That morning she had had a riding lesson. Oh, the joy of the realization that now it was "You're out of step" that called for comment; no longer, "You're in step!" How she loved Robin! And soon she was to have a short ride on Dick's brown hunter. She put away awful visions of stumbles and broken knees, of a mouth spoiled by her handling. What had Martin said? "You're more than half through before you've

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

begun—you have good hands.” And Martin paid no compliments about her riding; he was too much in earnest. Hadn’t he told her that morning not to sit as if she were an advertisement for ‘correct deportment taught in our riding-school’? She had never known how adorable horses were before; it seemed queer now to think that once she had been almost afraid of them. Oh, to think of the ride they had promised her, through Gorston woods, put up at the Rising Sun, have lunch there and tea, and back again in the cool evening—a ride through the sunset. . . .

She took a pink rose from her belt, and bent her head to smell it. It was the first one out in the garden that year.

Martin had found it and picked it for her.

At the back of her mind was a picture of a boyish face, very cross, ludicrously gloomy. . . .

Martin had gone to a duty lunch at a house six miles away. . . . He would be back in a little while—back to tea in the orchard. Was she too happy?

“What’s the matter, child?” Marcia had come up unobserved behind her.

Audrey jumped.

“Nothing,” she said. Then, hesitatingly: “I think that’s just it!”

“Oh, my dear!” Marcia leaned against the back of another chair, and sighed.

“Why are rector’s wives so often unattractive? It’s not a riddle. At least, it’s an unanswerable one, I suppose.” She sank into the chair, and began to pull out her hatpins. “Audrey, now I put it to you—isn’t my costume simplicity itself?”

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Audrey looked at the pale gray gown—so pale as to be almost white, and made very simply—at the charming mauve hat, and laughed. She was wise enough to understand the beauty and the costliness of that simplicity.

“Oh yes, it’s very simple,” she said, demurely.

“You’re laughing at me. But, my dear, it invoked a sermon on extravagance! It appears that it could have clothed throughout five heathen women! I said that I’d never be so cruel as to clothe one! And then came a sermon on frivolity. And then—worse—she began reckoning up how many poor children my unlucky frock could have clothed! And that did make me a little uneasy. Still, I ventured to point out that I had benefited all sorts of poor work-girls by having such a nice frock. Audrey, I don’t think rectors’ wives should be licensed pryers and spyers. One has to put up with rudeness from them that one would never stand from any one else. And, of course, Mrs. Delaunay ‘means well.’ They always do. She’s so exactly the type that’s always taken off in novels that she never seems quite real to me.”

“I’m terrified of her,” Audrey confessed.

“I wouldn’t let her get you into her clutches,” Marcia said, smiling. “There are all sorts of martyr-and-duty-possibilities in you. And now I suppose I must take that horrid book on chemistry to Professor Forbes!”

“I will! Let me!” Audrey said, eagerly.

Marcia looked at her from beneath raised brows.

“And tea coming! Tea here—and tea in that stuffy little drawing-room at ‘The Laurels.’ Did you ever hear Martin’s riddle about that room? ‘Why is Mrs. Forbes’ drawing-room immoral? Because it has no character!’

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

I can't let you take the book, and I can't send it, because she'll be hurt."

"But she won't be hurt if I explain that you were tired." There was an urgent note in Audrey's voice.

"Oh no, she would like you to go. She is very fond of you, poor little woman. It must be very terrible to be as tactless as she is," Marcia said, thoughtfully. "She's the sort of woman who invariably chooses cream as her topic of conversation when talking to any one suffering from a sick headache. Very well, if you really *mean* it, child, you shall go." Audrey went with a certain involved joy. She was glad to do anything for Marcia, and, confusedly, she had the feeling that by spoiling, even momentarily, her exquisite happiness, she was perhaps laying an offering, however small, of a conciliatory nature upon the knees of the gods.

She was frankly afraid of the Professor, who, like many learned people, considered that his learning gave him the right to be as brusque and rude in his manner as he liked. She declared she felt a worm in his presence, and such a small, insignificant worm, too.

Mrs. Forbes was in what she called her work-room: it was an ugly little room—the sort of room that becomes a storehouse for bits of furniture grown too old-fashioned and shabby for the other rooms. It was carpeted, too, with a faded carpet, the red-and-blue coloring of which clashed horribly with the green-and-pink wall-paper, but which had been brought from the Professor's study when grown too shabby for his use. It was essentially Mrs. Forbes' own room, and it typified what her clothes, too, proclaimed, that nothing mattered just for her.

When Audrey entered she raised her amiable little

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

rabbit face, with a worried smile, from a pile of fools-cap sheets, scribbled over with bewildering hieroglyphics in the Professor's undecipherable handwriting. She looked pale, and her eyes were strained.

"Oh, my dear, I knew you wouldn't mind coming in here. I'm so dreadfully busy, and I haven't any brains at all to-day. I suppose it's because my head aches so. Oh, that book? Thank you, dear. I'll take it to the laboratory presently, but I must not disturb the Professor till he rings for me. I wonder *can* you decipher this word for me?"

Audrey bent over the sheet held out to her, and stared appalled.

"I'm afraid I can't read any of it!"

"It's queer that clever men always write such intricate hands, isn't it?" A gleam of pride flitted across her pale face. "I am to have all this copied out by five o'clock. I have worked at it since two, and not done half! And now I'm so flurried and nervous I cannot read it at all! Oh, dear me!" Tears stood in her eyes as she gazed at a great blot her pen had made.

"Why doesn't the Professor have his papers typed by some one?" Audrey asked, the impatience she always experienced when brought in contact with him and his wife sharpening her voice a little.

"'The-exact-shade'—he objects to typing, my dear, and these notes are for himself, you know—'suggested-in-the-time-of-Hen-ry-the-seventh.' He can't read his own notes!" with an indulgent smile.

"I wish I could help you. Are they very important? Will he want them to-day?"

"Oh no. He is experimenting with—with—I forget

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

the name—to-day, but he always likes his notes copied out at once. Oh, my dear, here is a whole sentence I cannot make out! Is that 'are' or 'am'? Oh, and it's half-past four! My head throbs so, I really can hardly see!"

"But why don't you tell the Professor that your head aches, and that you will copy his notes out to-morrow?"

"Oh no! No! I would sooner try to do them. You don't understand. Such little things put out these clever men, and perhaps spoil some great thought. Oh, 'chemical'—that's a clue."

The door was opened harshly, and the Professor came in.

"I shall put down poison! I will not stand that dog's barking another day! How are you? Yes, he barked twice this afternoon, and the last time was disastrous! *Dis-astrous!* Why people keep dogs, I cannot imagine! Ridiculous! Unhealthy! They bring microbes and filth into the house. They have fleas. Have you finished those notes, Martha?"

Audrey was convinced, from the expression of his face, that he had forgotten the notes till he caught sight of them.

"I sha'n't be very long, Ambrose! Only a few minutes or so!"

"A few minutes! Why," bending over the table till his nose nearly touched the papers, "you've not copied out more than half! It's marvellous to me how women can be so slow! They make no use of their brains, and their hands—"

"Mrs. Forbes has a bad headache."

The Professor turned and peered; he had forgotten Audrey's presence, and her clear young voice had interrupted him in the beginning of one of his favorite

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

homilies. And the Professor was entirely unused to interruption of any sort.

"Oh, it's nothing! I can do them. I won't be long!" Mrs. Forbes cast an ungrateful glance at Audrey.

"A woman's headache," said the Professor, staring at Audrey, "implies, as a rule, disinclination, impatience, irritability, or laziness—"

"In this instance"—quaking but righteously indignant Audrey spoke out—"it implies a bad pain in the head!"

There was a little pause, and in that pause a certain antagonism, which the Professor had already experienced towards her, materialized into enmity. The Professor had in his nature a spitefulness popularly supposed to be a feminine attribute, and a tremendous sense of his own dignity—a sense so petty as to make him always afraid of some hurt; always on the look-out for slights; for non-appreciation of his mental stature. He decided that Audrey had failed towards him in due diffidence and respect. And after she had gone he began to brood: no subject, provided only that in some way, however slight, it had relation to himself, was too slight for him to ponder; and as is the way with spiteful natures which also brood, Audrey's delinquency grew.

"That girl," quoth the Professor to his pale wife that night, "was impertinent."

Mrs. Forbes made feeble excuses; and, as was her wont, succeeded in making him angrier than before, for with her customary tactlessness she hesitatingly suggested, in a roundabout way, that his lordly mind had perhaps been just a little ruffled by the barking of his neighbor's dog.

She was fully aware that his possession of a calm and

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

well-regulated mind, was one of his most cherished beliefs; she knew that nothing angered him more than a suggestion of any outside thing being capable of ruffling him. And she blundered, trying to help Audrey, straight on to the excuse that of all others would anger him most.

CHAPTER XIX

AUDREY read in the garden alone.

Every one had gone: Marcia and the children to spend the afternoon with friends; Dick and Martin after a horse described as possessing every equine virtue, and, at the same time, "going dirt-cheap."

It was very hot. Audrey let her book slip to her knee, and gazed dreamily up at the blue sky till her eyes were dazzled.

Something cold and damp was insinuated into her hand; she jumped, looked down, and met Euphemia's entreating eyes.

She said: "No, Euphemia, no."

Euphemia laid her beautiful head into her lap, and wagged her tail.

Euphemia had never yet been known to take "no" as final. Now she was intensely bored; the butterflies that afternoon flew irritatingly high; there was a sameness of flavor about tennis-balls that palled after a time; cook was unreasonable about tidbits. Euphemia wished to go for a walk, and she fully intended that her wish should be gratified by Audrey.

Audrey averted her eyes.

"Don't fidget, Euphemial!" she said, rather crossly.

Euphemia's wag held a hint of approaching triumph in its convolutions. She understood every shade of tone that

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

was wont to respond to her cajoleries: the firm, decided negative; then the irritable command to desist, that signified the annoyance of the speaker at her own weakness, as she felt her resolution slackening; then sharper irritation; more negatives, probably amplified by reasons this time; then doubt, then acquiescence.

Audrey went through it all.

"Lie down, Euphemia! Do you hear? Lie down!"

With heart-breaking meekness Euphemia lay down, close, so that she could plead with a slapping paw.

Audrey moved her foot from the vicinity of the paw, and shut her eyes.

Euphemia dragged herself along the lawn, and slapped her again. Audrey opened her eyes to chide, and was met with a gaze of liquid love, and a frantic paw and tail.

"No, Euphemia! I can't come out, it's too hot! And I'm terrified to take you all alone; you are so naughty sometimes. I can't really, Euphemia. No! I don't want to walk. I feel too lazy. It's so hot, Euphemia."

Euphemia understood exactly the moment when she might presume just a little. At the pleading note in the last words she pricked her ears; she rose, gave a short, sharp bark, and hurled herself against Audrey's knee.

"No, Euphemia! I didn't say I would! Don't be silly! Be quiet, Euphemia! I wonder if there is a breeze outside? It's so terribly hot. . . . If we walked towards Millbridge . . . Oh, I can't . . . Oh, I suppose I shall. Very well. We'll go for a walk, Euphemia, if you'll be a good girl. Will you be good—*good*, Euphemia? Through those lanes we can't meet motor-cars. Oh, darling, you *will* be good, won't you?"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Euphemia's agonized wriggles promised an angelic goodness.

They set out.

The lanes were very hot; the hedges very dusty. Audrey thought the wild roses looked thirsty. But it was a lovely afternoon. She cast an apprehensive glance towards Euphemia, who had a disconcerting habit of developing an unexpected independence out-of-doors. All the clinging love, the pretty dependence that were hers in the house, left her now. She was businesslike, intensely interested in her own concerns; impatient of Audrey's presence, if it interfered ever so slightly with her own convenience.

Audrey felt that she had no real authority over the nosing creature. She began to wonder why she had brought her with her. But it was a lovely day; she was glad she had come out. She turned to see Euphemia trotting across the road with something in her mouth.

"A rabbit! Oh, she has caught a rabbit!"

Her voice rang out, such agonized command in its tone that involuntarily Euphemia obeyed the order to 'drop it.' She opened her mouth, and a bedraggled yellow chicken fell with a soft flop onto the dusty road.

Audrey ran to it, picked it up. It was dead. She turned on Euphemia, but Euphemia had trotted back to the ditch; she returned with another chicken in her mouth, and dropped it proudly at Audrey's feet. It was as dead as its brother.

"Poor little things!" Audrey's wrath rose high. She raised the dog's whip, but Euphemia, tongue lolling, watched from a discreet distance. Then followed a distressing chase. Audrey was determined that Euphemia should be punished; Euphemia was equally determined

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

that she should not. Threats failed to have any effect upon her; she was fat, but she was a born dodger—that sort of moralless dog invariably is. Audrey, uncomfortably hot, very angry, gave up all idea of punishment, and descended to cajolery. She wanted now to fix the whip to Euphemia's collar, and lead her, so that she could kill no more chickens. At her change of tone—"All right. I won't beat you. Come here, Euphemia"—Euphemia flung her legs about in a ridiculous puppyish abandon, but still fled. Audrey, hating her with a most vindictive hatred, descended to stronger cajoleries, but they were of no avail, merely producing more puppy abandonment and the same crafty dodging.

Audrey turned from her at last, and, with a quaking heart, picked up the chickens. She hesitated, nervously eying the little farm-house that stood back from the road, with an exceedingly untidy garden in front of it. But her duty seemed clear to her. She pitied herself almost as much as she pitied the poor little dead chickens. She stroked the yellow down softly. Then she lifted her head high, pushed open the broken gate, and went up to the door. Hens fled expostulating before her; she looked back nervously at Euphemia peering through the gate. Suppose she were to jump it? Suppose she, too, were to push it open? She tapped timidly on the door, which was ajar, then waited. After a while she tapped again—louder this time. The next minute a man's footsteps echoed within. Her heart sank. A man! "Why wasn't he out at work?" she thought, indignantly.

She looked up into an exceedingly red face—a face framed in red whiskers, and possessing a humorous red nose. The man glanced down at the chickens in her hand.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Two more!" he ejaculated. "What chance does a man shtand these times, what wid the ould hins not layin' and the young ones down with the gapes?"

She only half heard what he said.

"I am very sorry," she said. "I have never known her do it before. It was my dog."

He glanced from her to Euphemia peering through the gate. "They was valuable chickens, miss, the pick o' the lot. I'd not be sellin' thim for less—" a pause, a keen glance at her face, "for less than five shilluns the pair of thim."

Audrey drew a deep breath.

"But they are very *small*," she ventured.

"At present," he said, with dignity. "But the eggs they'd be layin' and thim a valuable breed, a breed that 'll lay a dozen eggs to another hin's one, and do it aisy, too! 'Tis shootin' that's good enough for the dog that'll kill—"

She heard the gate creak; and he was getting angry; she was sure his face was redder. . . .

"I am very sorry. I will pay you for them, of course."

Five shillings! Walking sadly down the lane, smarting beneath the conviction that she had been cheated, she mourned the loss of all the money she had in the world just then. And if Euphemia were to find and kill any more chickens, what was she to do? There followed a hot and anxious quarter of an hour, spent in trying to catch Euphemia, and spent quite vainly. Audrey, relinquishing the idea as hopeless, started for the Hall at a brisk pace. She was hot and breathless, and the dusty road lay before her in an apparently unending line. When she was about half-way down it, she became aware of a commotion in the field on her left. It was an unmistakable com-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

motion; she gave one despairing glance round for Euphemia, knowing she would not see her, then ran up the road to the gate leading into the field. It was a large field, and in the farther corner she saw a fawn dog, tongue out, chasing fowls. The noise was awful. Euphemia was in their very midst; they were scattering and screaming, fluttering and gasping in every direction. Audrey flung herself over the gate; her voice called frantically to Euphemia; her whistle died breathlessly on her lips. She foresaw, terrified, a wholesale destruction of the hens. She ran, her heart throbbing in her throat; she was so hot that she could scarcely breathe. A man, attracted by the noise, had come into the field. He shouted to her to call off her dog; he yelled out that his master had sworn he would shoot the next dog that worried his fowls. She tried to run faster. She saw Euphemia on top of a white shrieking hen. . . . She cracked the whip. She chased her, but Euphemia was blind and deaf to all but the sport which engrossed her.

Some one swung over the gate; a new voice rang out, a strong whistle. Euphemia cocked an ear, then went on her way unheeding. Martin was near in a few long strides; the man found himself silently obeying orders delivered in an authoritative tone; the next minute Euphemia found herself trapped. Martin turned to Audrey. "Give me the whip," he said.

The air was rent by Euphemia's howls. Never had she received such a whole-hearted whipping as she was given then. The short sharp cuts fell unerringly—they actually pierced through her silky coat, and hurt exceedingly. The whip was then passed through her collar, and Euphemia, meek and subdued, walked sedately at Martin's side.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Audrey, all the hot little pulses in head and throat dying down, turned with him.

"You're done up," he said, gently. "Little devil!"

"Don't call me names," she said, smiling, and wondering what he would have thought had she subsided, upon his appearance, onto the grass and wept.

"I am very hot," she added.

"You shouldn't have brought her out. She's not fit for you to take out. That fool of a man, who just stood and shouted, needn't have got so excited; she'd never hurt a fowl. She only chases them for devilry."

"Oh no!" she exclaimed, involuntarily. Then weakly striving to shield the punished Euphemia: "Dogs who take to killing fowls are dreadfully hard to cure, aren't they? Isn't the road dusty?"

He glanced at her keenly. In a few minutes he had the whole story from her.

"Maloney," he said at the finish, and he smiled grimly. "There's a bank along here under some beeches that makes an awfully comfortable seat," he told her. "It's just round a bend where you'll get what breeze there is." He looked down into her hot face, and said, savagely: "I'd like to kill Euphemia. She's given you a beastly afternoon."

"Oh no. I'm silly to get so hot, and—and to mind so much. It *is* very hot, isn't it?"

"Awful. Here we are; now you sit there. I'm just going along to speak to Maloney. I'll be back in a minute."

"Oh! Oh, don't go! Why are you going?"

"Back in a minute," he called over his shoulder.

Poor Audrey! New terrors assailed her now. She saw Martin and the big, red man clasped in a deadly em-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

brace. She was sure Maloney would never return any of the money. . . . And he was such a huge man. . . .

Martin came swinging along the road; he waved his hat to her. In the other hand a basket. "Hurrah! Strawberries!" he shouted, boyishly, "hot from the sun! And I haven't touched one! What do you think of that?"

He laid two half-crowns in her lap.

"With Maloney's compliments. Chickens died from the gapes."

"Oh, was he *very* angry? What a wicked man!"

He eyed her amusedly.

"It must have been very tempting, you know. He described it to me."

"Did—did he want to fight you?"

"Fight me? Great Heavens, no! He's Irish, you know. Whole thing quite natural to him. Was I very long? Set all the little Maloneys to pick the strawberries. They'd just been having a dip in the river," he added, his mouth twisting humorously. "Aren't you going to start? If you don't take that big, bumpy chap there, I shall in a minute. I've resisted him all the way from Maloney's."

She took it, laughing greedily.

"He does taste good!" she said, biting into it.

"Give me the rest?" he besought.

"Don't spoil your magnanimity."

"But I want it. I really do." He was very much in earnest now. She felt her color deepening, and, with a laugh, popped the rest of the strawberry into her mouth.

He looked aggrieved.

"You're unkind."

"You shall choose next," she said, soothingly.

"You choose for me."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She picked out a small green berry, and handed it to him gravely.

He took it meekly and ate it.

Remorse immediately seized upon her, and she gave him a great juicy berry.

Then they both laughed joyously.

"Sha'n't we forgive Euphemia?" she said, hesitatingly.

He smiled down into her anxious face.

"Would you be as forgiving to me?"

She considered.

"I can't imagine you chasing fowls and dodging me—"

"No, I should never dodge you," he put in. "Well, you may forgive her."

Euphemia wagged her tail graciously; but her exuberance at being forgiven was not overwhelming: she did not care for strawberries, and she was very sleepy.

But Audrey derived great satisfaction from the proceeding. "I feel happier now," she said. "Don't you?"

"Not a bit," he declared, hard-heartedly. "I wasn't troubling about her."

She looked disapproving.

"Are you sorry I whipped her?" he asked curiously, and was surprised at her unhesitating—

"No." She added, honestly: "But I'd sooner you did it than I. I'm glad you whipped her."

"Hard-hearted!"

She looked up at him seriously.

"Am I? She was very naughty, she has to be taught—"

He burst out laughing.

"Did you think I meant it? You, hard-hearted?"

"A gypsy once told my fortune"—her face shadowed as she remembered the punishment that followed the episode,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

—"and she said that I had great firmness of character; so, you see, I'm not weakly soft."

"Did I say you were?"

"Your laugh said so."

"Tell me what the gypsy prognosticated for you."

Suddenly the pink in her cheeks began to deepen; she turned her head away.

"Oh, what a lovely breeze!" she said.

"Won't you tell me?"

"Tell you what? Oh, my fortune. Yes, but it's so long ago. Let me see. There was to be a fair woman who hated me." She plucked a blade of grass, and tickled Euphemia's ear with it. "And I was to make a very good marriage."

"Were you? Yes? Go on."

"There wasn't much else. I was to be married twice. I remember pondering the decease of my first husband with much sadness."

"Didn't she describe your husband to you?"

"Husbands," she corrected.

"Well, what was the first to be like?"

"Let me see—tall—"

"Yes."

"And fair—"

"Yes."

Suddenly, to her horror, she found herself telling a falsehood.

"With black eyes!" she said, hurriedly, and then sat appalled at her own depravity. For the gypsy had said his eyes would be blue. Why had she told such a horrid fib? She had never done such a thing before. She had not meant to do it now, but—somehow—it had slipped out.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"The gypsy," said Martin, crossly, "must have been a fool. No one can call a man with black eyes fair."

"Perhaps," she said, hesitatingly, "I—I have forgotten."

"That's it. I expect you have. I say," he bent his head and looked into her face, "don't you think he had blue eyes?"

"I—I don't know—"

"Say you think so," he coaxed, his blue eyes very tender, and to her irresistible.

"I—think they were," she said, in a low voice; and then suddenly out it came—another falsehood: "He had a black mustache!"

"Oh!" Martin sat back, shrugging his shoulders. "Isn't it all arrant rubbish?" he said. "You don't believe in it, surely?"

And suddenly she did not care a bit that she had told another falsehood—a worse one, this time. And she went on telling them, quite recklessly, and enjoying herself immensely.

"Oh yes! My gypsy was a real one, a real, old, genuine gypsy. I'm always looking out for the husband she gave me."

"I should think he'd give you rather a shock when you see him," observed Martin, unkindly. "A creature with golden hair and a black mustache and one eye blue and the other black!"

"Don't be ridiculous," she said, with dignity. "It is just the type I like. Fair doesn't necessarily mean golden hair, it only means that his complexion and hair will be lighter than his mustache."

"I'm glad he isn't to be a nigger, anyway. If his com-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

plexion weren't lighter than his mustache he'd be a darkie. What was your second like?"

"I don't seem to remember anything about him."

She grew hot as poignant memory swept upon her. She knew why she remembered nothing of that second husband: there had been no room for thought of him in the foolish little overjoyed heart that read Prince Charming into the gypsy's description. She saw again the dusty road, the hedge, on the other side of which her mother plucked blackberries; the beguiling dark-faced gypsy; her one and only sixpence going into an ever-ready pocket; then the trembling little girl in the dingy frock extending a small hand, and the tumultuous sentimental joy over the fair hair, blue eyes, and tallness of the promised husband.

"I'm quite sure that first fellow's eyes were blue, and he was clean-shaven," Martin remarked, obstinately.

"The predilection for a black mustache runs in our family. Poor Amelia loved a young man once who had a black mustache."

Martin said:

"After all, there's Tatcho and blacking."

"Euphemia," Audrey said, "I love even you now. Oh, what a glorious afternoon it is! I wish I could bottle tons and tons of all these scents, and smell them in the winter. Honeysuckle and hay, oh, and summer warmth!"

"There are three strawberries left," he said, "and I forget whose turn it is. What are we to do?"

She looked into the basket.

"Isn't it funny how all the little unripe ones get left? You may have the two green ones, and I'll have the little greeny-pink one. That's fair."

They sat on there, talking sometimes, and sometimes

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

silent. They quite forgot to go home for tea. Evening crept on softly, very beautifully. Cows passed them, going home to be milked, the sun flickering down upon their coats in patches through the leaves of the great trees whose branches met across the road. Once sheep passed, the old collie with them disdaining to notice Euphemia, who coquetted for his benefit, but dared not molest the sheep. Farther down the road a little gray donkey cropped the grass at the side of the road. It was the donkey who broke the spell of forgetfulness that had fallen upon Audrey.

He brayed suddenly. She jumped, and looked about with reawakened eyes.

"What is the time?" she asked.

He drew out his watch and stared.

"By Jove, it's a quarter past five!"

"Oh!"

She rose.

"I suppose you want some tea?" he said.

"Not particularly. I didn't dream it was so late, did you?"

He bent his head to her.

"Audrey, we—it's so nice being together—I mean, won't you stay with me? Will you come for a ride before dinner? Say you will. There's time."

"I should love it."

"You—" he bit the word off, and added a sober: "It's awfully good of you. Will you ride the brown?"

"If I may."

"Dick said you could have him whenever you liked."

"Let's hurry," she said. "You will ride Blackbird, won't you?"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"There's your tea—"

"Oh, I don't want any; the strawberries were my tea."

Marcia's maid smiled proudly as she helped her into a skirt that had belonged to Marcia.

"It doesn't look so bad, does it, miss?"

It was her invariable remark on such occasions.

Joyously Audrey answered:

"You've altered it *beautifully*, Walker! And it's *so* comfortable!"

"I'd like to see you in one of Bowen's habits, miss," Walker said. "You look very well on a horse."

"Twenty guineas, Walker! I'm afraid you'll never see me in one of Bowen's habits!"

She laughed as she ran down-stairs.

"Shall we go to the Abbey?" Martin asked.

"Yes, if we've time."

"We can just do it."

"I must just speak to Redcap."

Redcap was a horse Martin had just bought from Dick. Audrey adored him.

She had not yet quite got beyond a thrill of satisfaction on finding herself in step when her horse started to trot.

Martin said:

You gathered your reins up better to-day."

"Did I? I'm glad."

His seriousness over her riding always pleased her.

She rode dreamily awhile; then she said:

"It makes one wonder what beautiful things one may be missing."

"Riding does?"

She nodded.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I hadn't had any special longing to ride till you suggested it."

"I'm glad it was I who suggested it," he said, in a tone of content.

She was startled at the emphatic sense of agreement that she felt; the idea of her owing it to any one else was distasteful to her. Her heart quickened a little.

The breeze had freshened; it blew with cool softness in their faces. All along the road the scent of the honeysuckle, sun-warmed, was with them. As they rode the dreaminess of the evening deepened; all sounds came to them, softened by the peace, adding to the glamour.

Once she roused with an effort. She said, conscientiously:

"I hope the boys have had a nice afternoon."

He looked at her, a smile lurking in his eyes.

"You needn't be polite," he said.

"Needn't I?" She gave a glad little laugh. "How nicely you understand! Don't you want to talk, either? You don't mind if I don't?"

"I don't mind anything, so long as you're there," he said.

They rode on; they passed carts piled high with hay, the scent of it beautiful; sometimes brown-faced children were perched on top of it. The children laughed shyly at them; the men bade them good-night. There seemed a great fellowship of peace between all the world that evening.

Audrey found herself translating the indignant quacks of ducks, disturbed as they rode through their shallow pond, into amiable greetings. When fowls fled noisily from their path she sighed happily, thinking, softened, of the afternoon and Euphemia.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She said:

"The strawberries were very nice," and laughed.

"I've never tasted any like them," he declared.

They passed a field where men were loading a hay-cart. They stood, high on the hay, clear against the sky. The horses, beautiful great beasts, were rubbing noses. The men's voices broke now and then on the stillness.

She turned to him; she moved her whip, indicating the surrounding country.

"You have travelled. Have you ever found anything so beautiful?"

He replied, earnestly: "No, never."

They came upon the Abbey; a ruin now—piles of old gray stone among bracken and heather; here and there a wall still stood, slowly crumbling, with grass and weeds growing in its crevices, and moss adding to its desolate beauty. In one wall there was a long, narrow gap where once there had been a window; now grasses waved high in the frame. The shadows of evening lay about the ruins, deepening the sadness of them, giving a poignancy to their beauty. Beyond the ruins, to the left, the sun shone athwart a pond, but the Abbey stood in shadows, tall poplars standing out, behind it, black against the piercing radiance of the evening sky. The stillness of its peace was almost terrifying: Audrey, her breath catching in her throat, leaned a little towards Martin. She was so happy herself, so beautifully alive that night, that the thought of things and people long dead—dead with all the happiness and sorrow that had been theirs, was almost unbearable. She peopled the empty window with faces turned wistfully to the setting sun, pale faces, sweet with renunciation.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She said, softly, attuned to uttermost love of life just then:

"Oh, how wonderful one must be to be a nun!"

"I never can understand it," he said, frankly.

She was overpowered sensitively with a sense of her own worldliness.

"I wish I were good enough to be one," she said, wistfully, the beauty and the sadness working upon her.

He frowned.

"Why? You can be just as good out in the world. It's sentimentalism to think that only nuns are wonderful. We'd better hurry back."

His tone of healthy impatience dispersed a little her transient sad desires. The long canter on the grass that followed further dispersed them. She said, thoughtfully, when they dropped into a walk:

"It doesn't seem possible that one can be meant to renounce all this."

"I'm glad to hear you say anything so sensible. I was afraid you'd be turning Roman Catholic and entering a convent."

"You sound quite cross," she said.

"It's very rude of me. I suppose I'm nothing but a great healthy animal, and that's why that sort of thing strikes me as a bit sickly."

"I don't think you—you're a bit like that," she said, with shy kindness.

He smiled at her.

"You make me feel that I am," he said.

"I? Oh, why?"

He looked into her surprised eyes.

"There's a good deal of saint about you—spirit—that

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

sort of thing—delicacy; and sometimes I feel, beside you, that I'm rather a blundering sort of animal. That's what I meant, only I don't express it very well."

She was very serious; she said, earnestly:

"You read me quite wrongly. I expect what you mean is that I am not bright and sparkling like girls who have known heaps of people, and been about a great deal. What you call saintliness is a sort of stupidity when I can't catch on to what people mean."

He gave a sudden shout of laughter, then begged her pardon.

"Only, it was so delicious," he said. "I certainly don't mean that. Oh, Audrey, sometimes you don't seem a day older than you were when I helped you with your spelling. 'I'm very stupid.' Do you remember how you assured me of that?"

"Well, I was," she said, suddenly shy.

"I thought your wisdom was a good deal bigger than you were."

"Oh, there's a rabbit! His dear little white tail!"

The sun was setting in a haze of soft color, pale, gentle pink, with gleams of gold among it. Trees stood out dark against the sky; a cow, standing on a hillock, looked as if carved in bronze. The pink spread till all the world was pink. They walked their horses, looking at the sunset; they caught the sound of tiny rustlings in the hedges.

They spoke very little on their way back to the Hall.

When Martin helped her to dismount, he held her hand a moment.

"Have you enjoyed it?" he said.

She lifted her face to his. She said, simply:

"I have loved it."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Then her eyes fell.

"Have you?" she asked, gathering up her skirt.

"In all my life," he said, quietly, "I have never enjoyed anything so much."

She cast a quick glance at his face.

"Oh," she said, suddenly, running from him towards the house, "I shall be late for dinner!"

He stood looking after her. Then he turned to the brown horse.

"Dear old boy," he said.

CHAPTER XX

AUDREY practised dancing with the boys and Martin, sometimes in the ball-room, sometimes in the gymnasium-hall. Their governess, Miss Fenwick, was away on sick-leave during Audrey's stay at the Hall, so the music which Marcia liked them to have during some of their gymnastic exercises was contributed by herself or Martin. Audrey loved to watch them in that great empty room with its polished floor; its bars and ropes; its battledores and shuttlecocks, balls, skipping-ropes, hoops. The children were so beautifully supple and graceful, they looked so charming in their jerseys and knickerbockers.

Bobbie invariably afforded her great amusement: the strenuous efforts of her little fat body to curve and bend itself as her sisters curved and bent were very funny. The intense earnestness of her face was funny, too. But Audrey loved her best when, suddenly tiring, as babies do, she would trot pathetically into her arms, and fall asleep almost immediately.

Games were played there, too.

Marcia, coming in search of Audrey, found her there playing blindman's - buff. Audrey wore a short gray serge skirt and a white blouse. Above the stiff collar her face glowed, very small and soft and young, and vividly happy. Marcia smiled, then sighed.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

With a shout Martin, who was blindfolded, caught Bobbie, and swung her high above his head.

"Who *am* Bob?" she shrilled, excitedly. "Guess!"

"Can it be—Marcia?" guessed Martin. "No? Let me see—Jimmy, is it? No? Why, I do believe it's old Bob!"

Ecstatic arms round his neck; a joyous coo: "Yes, ole Bob! Dear ole *sweet* Martin—"

They blindfolded her: she trotted recklessly about the room, then her lips parted in a joyful smile—down she sat—

*"All in the dark alone
I wander 'neath the stars,
Angels look down upon me
Through the golden gate's b'ight bars."*

In the midst of their shaking of her Marcia approached Audrey. "Dear, your mother has sent word that Amelia is quite well. She wishes you to go home to-morrow."

"Yes," Audrey said.

Her eyes met Martin's suddenly. The blank disappointment in his face made her feel queer somehow, and as if, at any cost, she must get away from him.

Marcia followed her from the room.

"Mrs. Pat—Mrs. Hartley-Dent is coming down for the week-end," she said. "That will make six. Don't you think your mother would let you stay till Monday, child?"

Audrey had paused beside a window in the corridor; it was set deep in the thick walls, with a wide cushioned window-seat. It was a favorite spot of hers; from it there stretched miles and miles of sweet English country, away to where in the south the grave old hills stood senti-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

nel, mysterious in their soft blue mist, holding wondrous stories in their beautiful haze—stories of the little hill folk with which all the Barrington children were familiar, and which had never been told to Audrey in her childhood.

She turned restlessly away from the window: she wished she had not paused there—it made her way more difficult.

“I would rather go home,” she said.

Two days sooner. That was all. She said it to herself, bewilderedly. Only two little days. Why did it seem such a tragedy? Only two days. This time next week she would have been home for four days, even if she stayed till Monday. . . . Why was it so terribly hard to give up those two little days? Her mother was all alone, save for Amelia . . . and she had been so good to let her stay . . . had she always been as selfish as she was now, so horribly unwilling to give up just a few hours of pleasure?

“You would like Ferney Harrison,” Marcia said, regretfully. “He is such a dear, funny boy, and I wanted you to meet Sybil Faircourt—”

“I would rather go home,” Audrey said, in a gentle little mechanical way.

“Very well, dear. Mrs. Pat—every one calls her that—will be here to luncheon, I expect; the others will come to-morrow evening.”

The window possessed a fascination for Audrey: she moved back to it, as Marcia went on down the corridor.

A storm was brewing over the distant hills; big, dark clouds hung low, brooding in the still air; nearer, the clouds were white, huge massed white—great, glorious shapes against the clear bright blue of the sky.

Audrey sat and watched the dark clouds grow slowly violet—first their edges, then the gray was streaked every-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

where with the violet—the heavy awesome violet of the brewing storm. A little breeze stirred the line of tall pines that stood out black against the sky.

She was trying to understand. And yet she hardly knew what it was that she wished to understand.

The pine-trees were bending now; the wind was rising; there was an angry inner glow to the gray and violet of the massed clouds—a glow of copper. The hills were shrinking back behind a mist. . . . How she loved those dear hills. . . . But why did she feel those awful depths of wretchedness? She had been so happy just now playing blindman's-buff. . . . "Of course I am sorry to leave here, because every one is so kind to me," she told herself a good many times, but the reflection brought no comforting every-day matter-of-factness with it: tragedy still hovered.

She heard a step coming along the corridor. Martin drew near, and stood looking down on her.

"So you are going?" he said.

She nodded. Quite suddenly she wanted to cry, and the shame of it made her hot all over.

He sat down near her, and stared out of the window.

"There's going to be a storm," he said.

"Yes."

The peculiar, piercingly clear, yet gray light of the skies shone on her grave youngface. He looked at her for a long while in silence.

Then he spoke:

"Can't you stay—just a little longer?"

Something seemed to quiver within her; her heart beat with sudden stormy quickness, and at that moment she was throbbingly aware of a new and strange weakness.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She knew that if he were to ask her to stay she would beg her mother's permission.

Her conscience, her will, fought the knowledge. They found utterance in an almost whispered:

"I want to go home to-day. I ought to go. Don't ask me. . . ."

"Very well," he said, gently.

They sat in silence; the storm-clouds drifted nearer; the hills were swallowed up in the gray mist.

"You'll come back for the ball," he said.

The tension snapped. She gave a little laugh. She cried out:

"Why, I had forgotten it!"

"Had you?"

She looked at him wistfully: it was not strange to him that she should have forgotten it—the girls he was used to meeting no doubt forgot this ball and that, among the multitude of dances to which they went as a matter of course. But that she should have forgotten! She! Who had never been to a dance in her life! What had come to her?

"Suppose my mother won't let me come?" she said, with childish fear in her voice, but smiling at the same time. That her mother could really refuse she never contemplated. Austere as she had always known her, she could not think that a thing so harmless, so dear to her heart, could be denied her. Heavy drops of rain splashed onto the panes; in another minute the pines were blotted out. The world held nothing but that steady slanting rain.

"It will do the country good," Martin said, absent-mindedly. Then—"It's because you're going," he said.

She laughed.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"How poetical!" She looked up at him mischievously. "Add something pretty about how it rained when you had to leave that little girl years ago! Didn't you think of her in her little dark-blue mackintosh?"

"If I say I did, you'll say she never wore a mackintosh," he rejoined, loving her mocking face.

She rose.

"I did, but it was ginger-colored—an old one of my mother's, cut down. Good-bye."

"Don't go! Where are you going?"

She held out her hands.

"To wash these, for lunch."

There came the sounds of an arrival from the hall beneath; a voice—it was a peculiar voice, high and very slow—spoke plaintively—

"My dear Marcia, what a welcome! I know hospitality is hopelessly out of date, and of course I invited myself down, but to greet me with a deluge! My transformation is soaked through."

Audrey was peeping, twisting her neck to see the visitor.

"It's Mrs. Pat," observed Martin, gloomily.

"Isn't she ashamed of having to wear false hair?" she exclaimed, wide-eyed.

He smiled.

"Oh, that's a pose! She has splendid hair. They all talk like that."

"How funny! Her hair is my color," peeping, "only redder a little, isn't it?"

"Something like it," he conceded in an unwilling sort of way.

"But she has light eyes—oh, she flashed them right up

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

here," drawing back hastily. "She is very pretty, isn't she?"

"People say so."

"Don't you think so?"

"M—yes, in a way, I suppose she is."

"How tall she is," she sighed. "And what yards and yards of coat and frock!"

Jimmy and Tommy appeared, arms around each other.

"Mrs. Pat? Oh, bother," observed Jimmy. "I won't speak a word all through lunch."

"Why not?" Audrey asked.

"Because she always says to dad: 'How delightful! I love to draw children out!' I don't like being drawn out."

"Neither do I," chimed in Tommy.

"And it isn't fair when you have to be so polite to people because they're in your house."

"Grown-ups," ruminated Jimmy, pessimistically, "are awful rotters, as a rule. No one decent is coming this week 'cept Ferney and Miss Faircourt. That old Wetherby's coming, Tommy!"

"I do really b'lieve I'll *burst* being polite to him," Tommy opined, mournfully.

Jimmy turned to Audrey.

"He takes you on his knee, and he says, 'Well, little girl,' and he takes hold of your hand, and says, 'This little pig went to market; this one stayed at home—' He does really. To *me!*'"

"Miss Gwendoline, come and have your hands washed!"

They went, still entwined.

CHAPTER XXI

SUSAN moved about the house with an odd restlessness. She had risen even earlier than usual, and had gone, directly she was dressed, into Audrey's little bedroom. She had stood there looking round, a new apprehension rendering her imagination more vivid than usual. She saw, standing there, a large handsome room—she saw dainty lace curtains to the big windows—beautiful chairs—bed—wardrobe. . . . Her puckered little face seemed to pucker into closer lines as she looked about Audrey's room; at the narrow little childish bed where Audrey had slept from babyhood; at the plain homely furniture; at the row of hooks behind the cretonne curtain that served for wardrobe; at the wall-paper where the little bunches of red rosebuds had faded into pink. She looked at the two little latticed windows set deep in the wall; it had never struck her that they needed curtains. . . . The room was sweet and fresh and pathetically young. . . . There were none of the knick-knacks dear to the hearts of young girls; no pretty frivolities; it was almost austere neat. Only on the mantel-shelf there were photographs of Marcia and Dick and "the boys."

Susan went close and studied them with a queerly fierce intensity. Then she went to the window and looked out over the country. The view from Audrey's window was a very beautiful one; it looked to the hills, and before the

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

hills to the miles and miles of fields, with the flash of the river as it wound in and out losing itself in Brierly Wood, whose great trees stood up always clear against the misty blues and purples and grays of the hills.

Many years ago Susan, with the inconsistency born of the warring of her mother-nature, with her inherited austerity, had chosen that room for her baby, because of the beautiful view from the windows.

She turned away now and went swiftly to her own room. At the foot of the bed there stood a large old-fashioned trunk. She selected a key from the bunch hanging at her waist and unlocked it. It was packed full of clothes. She rummaged among them till she found an old muslin frock, which she took out. It was the frock in which she had been married one day in June twenty-one years ago. For a minute her thoughts leaped back to that day, to the little quiet gray church. She saw again the hollow worn in the third step of the flight that led up to the porch, the hollow that had caused her to stumble, so that her old father had uttered a shocked "Hush!"

She saw the tall form of John Fielding waiting in the dim interior of the little church; she saw his narrow shoulders bent in prayer as he knelt beside her. She had seen him like that many times afterwards, for he was a devout man. She saw it all in one minute's thought, but her face did not soften; it remained merely contemplative.

Then she rose and carried the gown down-stairs.

She was a quick worker. In two hours' time short curtains fluttered at Audrey's windows—dainty little white muslin curtains with knots of pink roses. They gave a new air of girlish charm to the bare little room.

Susan ate no breakfast. Amelia noticed the rasher of

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

bacon left on her plate, and ate it up herself. Amelia was one of those people who dearly love "bits in between."

After breakfast Susan went up to her room and made her bed, but her movements were not the same as usual; the brisk regularity that always characterized her actions had given place to a certain jerkiness, an uneven haste. As she went about her duties a dull little flush grew on either cheek; her doggy eyes were very bright; they turned every few minutes to the clock on the mantelshelf. As the hours dragged on the accumulated jealousy and longing of those days without Audrey rose to a pitch that became agony. She began to picture tragedies: nothing was too wild for her just then. Audrey had refused to return to her bare home—to her homely, unattractive mother. Marcia had taken her away—abroad.

She went to the window and stood staring out blankly: she saw nothing of the landscape, but the peace of it told upon her insensibly, and she realized with a shock her nervous hysteria. She turned away, snapping her lips together with dogged determination, and began to dust the room.

The morbid fancies she kept at bay by her strength of will, but she could not prevent herself from listening to every tiniest sound, though she knew that Audrey was not to come home for two hours yet. Presently she heard a movement in Audrey's room; she stood listening, the blood surging up to her lined forehead, but the movement was clumsy, and she knew that it was Amelia in there. An angry light gleamed suddenly in her eyes; it transformed her face, so that, as she sprang forward to the door, she looked like some wild animal. . . .

"What are you doing in here?"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Amelia turned with a start; a jug she held in her hand fell to the floor and broke.

"Lord save us!" mumbled Amelia, her hand to her side.

Susan waited, eying her.

"I—I was only putting a few flowers—" Amelia said, sullenly.

Susan's eyes went to the little jar holding a bunch of honeysuckle; the flowers were crammed in with a horrible lack of taste; but Susan did not see that, she only saw an effort to oust her from the place due to her as Audrey's mother—an attempt to win the child from her. Her face worked; then she said, quietly:

"You know I do not approve of flowers in a room. They are not healthy. Take them away."

She waited while Amelia picked up the pieces of the broken jug, and, taking up the jar of flowers, left the room. Then alone, Susan moved aimlessly about, touching things.

She went back to her own room, a look of deep worry lining her face, locked the door, and, kneeling down by the old-fashioned wardrobe, inserted a key into the lower drawer and opened it. She knelt there, staring down into the drawer. All the color, the eager painting of anticipation, had left her face; she looked pale and weary. She pressed her hands to her eyes, the old tired formula rose to her lips:

"I am right. A mother always knows."

But it was so old, so stale, that it carried no conviction: she had said it so often. . . .

"All young things love flowers. . . . Why shouldn't she, just because I never did?"

An insistent voice spoke in her ear.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

“Neither did her father—nor any of his family—only—that others—has that extravagant love for them—”

She put her hand into the drawer, then drew it away with a shudder, turned the key hastily, and rose.

She went down-stairs carrying some tea-cloths that required hemming. She sat down quietly and began her work.

Amelia, looking in once, went away with a sniff of superior wisdom.

“A proper mother,” quoth Amelia, who was full of those little bits of conventional wisdom that are most unwise, “would never sit there working when her only daughter was coming home!”

CHAPTER XXII

AUDREY woke, upon that last morning of hers at the Hall, with a queer homesickness strong upon her. It was so unexpected that her stern young conscience suggested a certain ingratitude to Marcia. She blushed as she lay on her pillows. But her good sense came to her aid: she was as grateful as ever to Marcia, but she wanted her mother.

Last night Martin had said "Good-night." . . .

Dreaming, her heart began to beat stormily. Yes, she wanted to go home. . . .

And Mrs. Pat stared so—

She wanted her mother. . . .

And the bare little house—she wanted her own little bedroom. She wished she could go now—at once—before breakfast. . . .

Yet she had been very happy here—she was so happy now. . . .

But she wanted to go home.

Unused to self-analysis, she was pathetically at a loss now. Half-formed thoughts and feelings were instinctively choked back; dreams were wrapped in a sensitive haze that hid their real meaning, or only half revealed it. Her nature, essentially shy, and young even for her years, made her shrink from this great new thing that was invading her life, even while it gave a new beauty to everything, even

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

while it made her heart beat at times with a happiness that was almost suffocating.

Yesterday a tragic despair had held her at the thought of leaving the Hall. To-day she was eager to go. To-day she wanted to get away—to her mother and the little gray house on the hill. And she did not understand. . . .

Nor did she understand what it was that made her afraid as she went down to breakfast—that sent her back once to her room in a veritable panic of fear.

“It’s Mrs. Pat.” She tried to explain it to herself.

Then she went down.

She entered the sunny morning-room walking a little stiffly, and with a very serious face. She was relieved to find that Mrs. Pat was not down; but the fresh access of shyness that had seized upon her made her grave and unresponsive; it made her ignore Martin as much as possible. She talked to Marcia and Dick. Dick was so big and comfortable; she felt a great affection for Dick that morning.

Marcia glanced two or three times at Martin: his boyish face was grave; it seemed to her that it was older. She grew uneasy. She began to think of Martin’s tyrannical old father, with his pride of race, his obstinacy, and his deep love for his only son. Audrey’s youthfulness had hitherto somewhat blinded her; she had looked upon her and Martin almost as two children, Martin being, in his way, as young for his age as Audrey was for hers. Almost, Audrey had seemed like Jimmy’s sister, a sister only a few years older, and Martin standing in much the same relationship to her as he did to the boys. But now she began to wonder had she been wrong. She thought of Susan—then, looking at Audrey, felt that she had been

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

guilty of snobbishness. The name Fielding, at any rate, was an old and good one, and Audrey herself . . . Marcia fell a-dreaming over an old man—a somewhat lonely old man he was—and Audrey. Would she help, ever so little, to fill the cruel gap that his wife's death had left in his life? His wife had been sweet and soft and young and dignified. Audrey, with all her childishness, her inexperience, had a dear little dignity of her own. Marcia succeeded, with astonishing ease, in picturing her at Hurstonleigh. She saw her in the beautiful old rooms, celebrated for the wondrous carving of their mantel-shelves. She saw her in the library, in the garden. Hurstonleigh was a very lovely old place, and Audrey fitted in there with a strange suitability. But Marcia smiled, for, after all, she was giving her imagination too free a rein; she really knew nothing, and there might be no foundation for her suspicions.

Before Audrey left the Hall she received a message from Mrs. Pat's maid. Mrs. Pat wanted to say good-bye to her. Audrey was surprised, but rather flattered.

She found Mrs. Pat reclining in a lounge-chair; she rested against blue cushions of all shades, and she was clad in an elaborate green dressing-gown. The effect was startling, and distinctly attractive.

She yawned in response to Audrey's greeting; yawned loudly, and flung a letter with childish petulance to the floor. "I hope you're not a cat," she observed. "I never admit my friends into my bedroom, but I think you're safe."

Audrey did not understand.

"You look sufficiently innocent; but so do Persian kittens, and they can scratch."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I don't know what you mean," Audrey said, sitting down.

"Don't you? Women in the morning in their bedrooms always make me think of amateur photographs: there's a ghastly crudity, a lack of discreet shading about them; they haven't been touched up, you know."

Audrey did not understand that all this was affectation; that Mrs. Pat's negligée get-up had kept her maid busy for nearly two hours that morning.

"Child, what would you do with bills—bills—bills?" Mrs. Pat flung another to the floor.

"Pay them," Audrey said, a gleam of mischief in her eye.

"Oh, good gracious! Lucille, isn't Miss Fielding's hair a beautiful color?"

"Oui, Madame."

Lucille's little black eyes stared at Audrey's head.

Audrey felt uncomfortable: she had noticed already that the maid was staring at her, as she picked up a frock here, a blouse there, and put them away. Mrs. Pat stared, too. Audrey rose.

"I must go."

"Must you? Is that rectory creature coming this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Then I've a headache, a most horrible headache. Lucille, you'll get out several of those new novels. I'm sick of this one."

Audrey bent to read the title; Mrs. Pat drew it away.

"Marcia would faint if she thought I'd let you read even the title," she said, a sneering reflection in her voice. "Marcia is a most astonishing prude."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Oh no!" Audrey cried, indignantly.

"Are you a devotee, too? Don't let her influence you too much, child; you can never be a prig with that hair!"

"But—she isn't—"

"Oh, I know! She's altogether beautiful. I was only joking. It was the thought of Mrs. Delaunay that upset me. A woman has no right to go through the world like a hearse. She gives me the mollygrumps. Don't go for a minute."

Audrey stood uncertain; she was aware that behind her Lucille was watching her; it made her nervous.

"I must go," she said, hurriedly. "Good-bye."

Mrs. Pat's eyes looked over her head for a moment, then she smiled cooingly.

"Are you cross with me, child? I was only joking, you know. I am very fond of Marcia. She is so beautiful that she makes me jealous. I have always wanted to be beautiful."

Audrey was fascinated; the sudden simplicity bewildered her. It was so out of keeping with the brilliant Mrs. Pat of the evening before; the Mrs. Pat who had kept them all laughing; who had said such queer, bitter, witty things.

"You *are* beautiful," she said, impulsively.

A gratified gleam shone in Mrs. Pat's light eyes; her vanity was so intense that even a tribute from an insignificant little girl was welcomed by her. Moreover, she was not beautiful; her clever make-up and a certain fascination deceived people occasionally into believing, for a brief moment, that she was beautiful; but she was not, and, beneath all her uneasy vanity, she knew it.

Also she was intensely bored. She always was intensely bored at the Hall; she never invited herself there except

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

when too horribly pressed for money, or when there was some undesirable story afloat about her. "I go to the Hall for my moral Turkish baths," she had told a man once. "Women are such cats—they make it necessary sometimes."

She and Marcia had been to the same school. She had been a big girl on the eve of leaving when Marcia had come, very young and spoiled, to the school, and she had shown a certain careless good-nature to the child, whose adoring admiration she found amusing.

Their mothers had loved each other. For such memories Marcia still welcomed her to the Hall, though they had nothing in common, and many things about Mrs. Pat were distasteful to her. But she knew that beyond incorrigible extravagance, and a reckless tongue that made enemies, there was no real harm about her old school-fellow.

Now she held out a long, delicate hand to Audrey.

"Good-bye, little girl; really you make me feel quite a healthy liking for bread-and-butter."

"Good-bye."

"But then it's salt butter, you see," Mrs. Pat called after her.

As the door closed behind her, Audrey heard her say:

"You're sure? The exact shade?" and Lucille's response:

"Oui, Madame."

CHAPTER XXIII

MARTIN drove Audrey home.

Susan was waiting in the little old-fashioned porch: she did not come down to the gate. But Audrey, at sight of her, felt a sudden warm rush of love that for the moment drove out all memory of her mother's disapproval of excessive tokens of affection. She felt very young and helpless, and glad to be back again. She sprang from the dog-cart and ran up the path. "Mother!"

There was no doubting her: even Susan's jealous suspicions were laid at rest. Her stiff little figure relaxed; she felt suddenly very tired, but very happy.

"Mother, this is Mr. Jocelyn."

Audrey, shy-eyed, smiling, spoke with her arm still around her mother. She felt so safe now—so brave, so able to meet his eyes, to smile at him!

Susan spoke stiffly:

"Will you come in and have a cup of tea?"

It cost her a great deal to say it, since the thought of a stranger there with her and Audrey was painfully repugnant to her, but she had her own queer standards of hospitality. Martin made some excuse about his horse, and so won a certain measure of approval from her. She thought he showed nice feeling in refusing to make a third. But Martin was not thinking of her. His face was unusually grave; he did not smile as he bade Audrey good-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

bye. His nature was simple and straightforward: he could not understand Audrey's change of manner. To him it could signify only one thing: that, since she had said he had done nothing to offend her, she was tired of him, she wanted to get away from him. The realization of it brought the world toppling in a storm of darkest woe about him. He understood suddenly what she had grown to mean to him. And he set his lips in an obstinate line as he drove away from the gray cottage.

CHAPTER XXIV

“MOTHER, I want to ask you something.”
Amelia had left the room: Audrey and her mother were alone. As she spoke she played nervously with her teaspoon.

Susan waited. She had a great gift for silence, and, without intention on her part, there was always a grimness about her waiting, as if she expected to hear nothing that was good.

Audrey's eyes roved appealingly round the room. Finally, fixing her gaze on a patch of vivid sunlight that lay across the butter, she said:

“Mrs. Barrington is giving a dance on the twenty-first.”

Susan said nothing for a while; she sat looking at the young face so full of anxious hope.

“And you want to go, I suppose?” she said.

“Oh, Mother, yes! May I?”

“You really think you will find pleasure in whirling about in a hot room?”

Audrey laughed.

“How you strip it of all poetry, Mother! Yes, I think I shall.”

“But you can't dance.”

With her queer inconsistency her pride was up in arms at the thought of her child's cutting a poor figure up at the Hall. Audrey, for some unaccountable reason, blushed.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Yes, I can. I have been practising at the Hall."

Susan noted the blush; her thoughts flew fiercely to Martin; beneath the cloth she gripped her hands tightly. But her voice was quite calm as she said:

"We could get your dress made in Peterhampton."

"Oh, Mother! Oh, really? Then I may go? What material will it be? I want something soft—very soft. I wonder"—reflectively—"what Mrs. Pat's tea-gown was made of? It was so lovely—it curled about—all soft, but I expect she paid a fabulous price for it."

"Who is Mrs. Pat?"

"That isn't her real name. I forget what it was. Every one calls her Mrs. Pat. Mother, when can we go?"

The next day she went into Peterhampton with her mother; the material was chosen, and taken to the best dressmaker the town boasted of. To Audrey this was undreamed of magnificence; she had thought she would make the frock herself.

Two days later she went again into the town to be fitted. It was when they were walking home from the station that the dog-cart from the Hall passed, Dick driving, with Mrs. Pat beside him.

"Didn't she look handsome, Mother? What a dazzling blue she was wearing! No one else *could* wear it, I think—Mother, what is the matter?"

Susan's face had gone quite white; she turned her head and looked at Audrey, but in her eyes was that peculiarly frightening expression which denotes that the mind is seeing some picture of its own.

"Nothing!" she said, curtly.

"But you are so pale, Mother! Sha'n't we rest a little?"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"No. Don't fidget, child."

They walked on slowly. In the west the gold was rapidly changing; a pink light crept over the country; it deepened till the water left by a heavy shower in the ruts of the road gleamed blood red. Susan shivered violently.

"It was—like that. I saw it," she muttered, with sudden loss of self-control. For a minute she gripped Audrey's arm hard; then she dropped her hand and walked on.

"Won't you hold my arm, Mother?"

Audrey spoke timidly, terribly afraid.

"No. I am quite well now. It was only a sudden—faintness."

Audrey walked slowly to spare her, but the little stiff figure, in its dark-gray coat and skirt, marched on, so erect that there was a suggestion of desperation in the taut pose, and Audrey was obliged to quicken her pace.

Presently Susan spoke in her usual voice.

"Who was that woman in the dog-cart?"

"Mrs. Pat, Mother."

She jerked her hand with a certain quivering irritation.

"What is her real name?"

"I can't remember—quite. Something Dent—Hardy-Dent, I think—"

"Hartley?"

"Yes, that's it. Do you know her, Mother?"

"I have heard of her. She is a—" She stopped abruptly, as if she were choking back something that she longed to say.

They climbed a hill in silence.

They passed a cottage where dying white poppies hung limp and dragged, round their roots little red pools. . . .

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Audrey, her mind attuned morbidly by her mother's, thought that they were bleeding to death.

She shuddered and spoke impulsively.

"Say something to me, Mother! Do you feel better?"

"Yes." She turned her head and looked into Audrey's pale face. "Did you like her?" she said.

"Like whom, Mother?"

"Mrs.—Hartley-Dent."

"Oh! Well, I didn't see much of her," she hesitated.

"Yes, I *think* I liked her! She—"

Again there was that quivering irritation, an almost unbearable impatience, when Audrey halted.

"She what?"

"She is very fascinating, and she says such queer things. I can't help watching her," Audrey hurried on, eager to talk, to interest her mother, striving to bring about an every-day atmosphere once more. "I felt very proud when she admired my hair. You see, hers is the same color, only a little redder and golder, I think, and she says it's a very uncommon color—"

"I thought her hair was brown—dark-brown." The mutter came stiffly from Susan's lips.

"Oh no! Mother, look; this stone is quite dry. Won't you sit down a little while?"

Susan did not seem to hear her.

"You—feel—drawn—to her?" she said, slowly.

"I think I do. She's so fascinating."

Susan said no more. She walked on with her usual firm, quick step.

When they reached the house she turned to Audrey.

"I am going to help Amelia get supper ready."

"Oh, Mother, let me do it!"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Why should you?"

In the darkening hall she faced Audrey, looked at her, haggard-eyed, defying her pity, repudiating all idea of there being anything the matter with her.

"You are not well, Mother—"

"I am quite well. Amelia needs help." She added, with an unusual air of recognizing that there was need of explanation, "She is still not so strong as she was before her illness."

"But I could help her," Audrey persisted.

"There is no need for us both to help her." Susan had removed her coat and her little old-fashioned straw hat. "I don't wish you to come, too."

She went into the kitchen, and proceeded to gather together plates and dishes, while Amelia, a good deal surprised, sat and looked into the fire. For a while there was no sound but the clatter of a plate or spoon; then Susan spoke:

"Mrs. Hartley-Dent is staying at the Hall."

"Lord save us!" gasped Amelia, and her face went patchy. "Then—then—has Audrey met her?"

"Yes." Susan turned and looked at her. "Why shouldn't she?"

Amelia put up her hand and fumbled with her curls.

"I don't know, I'm sure. Only—she might mention the wreck, and—and—you've never told Audrey—"

"I shall tell her now."

"Lord save us!" gasped Amelia once more.

"I wish you wouldn't be so vulgarly profane!" Susan said, with sharp irritation. "I have never mentioned it to Audrey, because it is a subject which I'm not anxious to talk about—"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"No," muttered Amelia, with a shiver.

"And she is very sensitive." Susan's manner was not like her usual one; she was quite palpably making excuses, and it did not come naturally to her to do it. "I was afraid it might prey on her mind. But if—this woman—remembers we were on board with her, she may mention it, and it would make Audrey uncomfortable not to know about it."

"I always thought it was a mistake not to tell her," Amelia said, with an unusual flash of common-sense.

"I thought it better," Susan replied, curtly.

She left the kitchen and went back to the room where Audrey sat idly looking out of the window.

"I am going to talk to you about your father."

Audrey turned a startled face to her.

"Oh—yes," she said, breathlessly.

"He died, as you know, when you were a baby."

"Yes."

Susan seemed to find it difficult to go on; all the effort of her stubborn will could not succeed in disguising her intense repugnance for the subject.

Audrey, in spite of her great wish to know more of her father, said, gently:

"Need you speak of him, Mother?"

"I wish to. He was drowned. We were coming back from America, where we had gone, partly because a sea-voyage was ordered for his health, and partly because he wanted to visit friends there. The *Victoria* went down. There was a terrible storm. She crashed into a rock. Twelve people were drowned, of whom your father was one. The rest were saved."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She paused, and again her eyes seemed to be looking at some terrible picture.

Into Audrey's quick mind came the memory of that mutter as she had stared with terror-filled eyes at the rain gleaming red in the ruts of the road.

Audrey saw pictures, too, now. . . .

"A man was hurt in the rush—and a woman, too—there was blood in the sea—" Susan spoke in a dream voice, as if she hardly knew that she was saying her thoughts aloud.

Audrey went up close and timidly put her arms about her.

"Mrs. Hartley-Dent was on board, too," Susan said, sitting stiff beneath her embrace.

"Oh, Mother!" There was understanding and remorse in her voice. "Oh, poor, *poor* Mother! Now I understand . . . dear, it was good of you to tell me! Oh, how brave and good you always are! . . ."

Eager young admiration shone in the eyes that looked up at Susan. Audrey rubbed her cheek against her mother's hand. Susan drew it away with a sudden sharp gesture, as if something had hurt her badly.

She rose hurriedly.

"Don't!" she said, harshly.

She went across to the mantel-shelf and put a vase straight.

"I think that's all," she said. "Amelia was with us, too. She was coming to England to marry a man she had met in New York. She found him already married. Then she came here."

"Was she my nurse?" Audrey asked.

"No."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Susan stood a minute silent; then:

"Your nurse saved you. The shock killed her; she died a week later."

Audrey stood by the table rebuffed. The tears crept to her eyes, but she blinked them back with mixed feelings: pride, and a longing to do what her mother would like best.

"It—it must have been—terrible," she said, struggling for some more adequate expression.

"Yes," Susan said.

She went to her work-basket and picked up her thimble.

"If ever you see Mrs. Hartley-Dent again, you will not, of course, mention the subject to her. It is naturally a painful one."

"Was her husband drowned, too, Mother?"

"Yes."

She took out her work and sat down with it. She broke a length of cotton from the reel, and tried to thread her needle, but her hands shook so that she could not do it. Audrey took a step forward, then stood hesitating to offer to thread the needle. For her mother's face was set in harsh lines of determination; the obstinacy of her mouth and chin showed with intensified plainness, as if there were some bigger issue at stake than the mere threading of a needle.

And when at length success was hers, a gleam of relief out of all proportion to the occasion shone across her face. Least superstitious of mortals as she was, her nerves were so upset by what she had just passed through that she accepted the threading of the needle as an omen. As she made a knot at the end of the cotton, she spoke:

"Her child was drowned, too."

CHAPTER XXV

AUDREY sat reading her Bible.

She sat rather erect, her lashes casting shadows on her cheeks, her lips very grave. On the gate a thrush had perched; he was singing his gallant little heart out.

"And the other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son . . ." Audrey read, and between her and the page danced a pink may-tree and a thrush singing. . . . A handsome, boyish profile. . . .

"He will be at the dance." Then a horror-stricken blush. . . .

"And this said, No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king."

Only five more days! Had she forgotten the figures of the lancers? She would wash her hair the night before, so that it should wave and crinkle.

Would four dances be too much? Because, of course, she knew Martin so well, and so would not feel at all nervous, as she would with a stranger. And two for Dick, if he should want them. . . .

Did thrushes perhaps go to dances up in the blue of the sky?

How he sang! . . .

Involuntarily she listened for the buzz of a blue-bottle . . . She was glad that white suited her so well. . . . Then in sudden hot abasement she hid her face in her hands.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Oh, what a horrid, hard, callous girl she was! Only yesterday it was that her mother had told her of the manner of her father's death, and she could not keep her thoughts from the dance! Hadn't she a heart at all? She had picked up her Bible because her thoughts were so unsuitable, and now they were as bad as before. Last night she had felt so miserable, and now because the sun shone and a thrush sang. . . . She was so bitterly ashamed of herself! More erect than before, her lips set closer, she went on reading:

"Then said the king, The one saith, This is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead: and the other saith, Nay; but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living.

"And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king.

"And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.

"Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.

"Then the King answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof."

She looked up from the Bible, her face full of thought. Susan came into the room carrying the lamp, which she had been cleaning.

"Mother, wasn't Solomon's way of solving to which woman the baby belonged wonderfully simple and grand?"

Susan put the lamp down on the table with a little clatter. She turned and looked at Audrey, at the Bible

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

on her knee. "What made you read that?" she said, sharply.

"I don't know. The Bible opened there. Don't you think it was wonderful, Mother? Of course, I mean for those times. No woman would agree to have any child cut in halves now."

"Wonderful?" Susan gave a harsh laugh. "No! She was a poor, meek creature—that mother—or it wouldn't have answered as it did."

A feverish color had leaped to her cheeks; her eyes shone. "No mother worthy of the name would give up her child to another woman! She would sooner see it dead before her! 'Give her the living child.' Never! Could she stand by and see another woman take her child from her?—see it in another woman's arms?"

"But—to save its life, Mother?"

"I tell you she would sooner see it dead before her eyes."

"Then you think that the other woman was really the mother, after all?"

"The other woman? 'And she said, Let it be neither mine nor thine.' No; Solomon was right, but she was a poor, weak fool of a mother. She should have cried out: 'Kill him! Rather than give him to the other, kill him, and he will still be mine!'"

"Would Solomon have known then, I wonder?" Audrey mused.

"I doubt it; for men thought then, as they think now, that a mother should be a mass of maudlin sentiment."

She left the room.

Audrey sat thinking.

Presently Susan came back; she began to dust the room.

"You are very idle this morning," she said.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Audrey jumped up guiltily.

"I'll fetch that blouse I am making," she said, going towards the door.

"Wait a minute. I want to tell you that—I have changed my mind about the ball."

She did not look at her as she spoke.

Audrey stood still.

"Changed your mind, Mother? Do you mean—?"

"I mean I would sooner you didn't go."

There was a little pause. Susan dusted the back of a chair, while Audrey stood and watched her, her eyes very bright.

"Why?" she said, at last, and there was a note in her voice that her mother was quick to recognize as new.

"You must give me a reason, Mother."

"I have several reasons," Susan replied, bending low over the chair and speaking hurriedly, as if she were anxious to be done with the subject. "It will very likely unsettle your mind. It is best for you to live quietly, as there won't be other dances and—and things like that. I think balls are foolish things, and dancing ridiculous. I don't approve of them. So you will stay at home!"

Audrey still stood by the door. She stood very erect, so that she looked, in her indignation, to tower above Susan, still bending to dust the chair.

"Those are not reasons," she said, with judicial coldness; "at least, they are not adequate reasons, since you must have thought the same when you said I might go."

Susan straightened herself and faced her, the duster held tightly in her right hand.

"Hasn't it ever struck you," she said, in a hard voice, "that your position is rather peculiar? Do you like visit-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

ing where your mother is not thought good enough to be received?"

A wave of scarlet surged over Audrey's face; then it receded, and she answered, sanely:

"Of course I have thought about it, Mother. But you know that it isn't true. Mrs. Barrington has asked you to go to the Hall. You know that she would be pleased if you would go."

Susan did not answer immediately. She recognized the fact that she had a new Audrey to deal with, an Audrey who had put away her old childish fear of her mother's anger, and was prepared to do battle for her rights.

To Audrey, standing stiff and defiant, came memory of her mother's grief the day before, her telling of the manner of her father's death. Her face softened; when she spoke the hardness had gone from her voice.

"Mother, you will let me go? How about my dress? And I have told Mrs. Barrington I can come. You won't forbid it now, Mother, will you?"

"I have written, counter-ordering your dress. I hope they will take it off my hands. We needn't discuss it any more, I think."

But indignation flamed in Audrey's eye; anger and disappointment shook her voice as she began to speak, but it steadied after a moment, and every word had its value, evidently coming straight from her heart.

"Mother, it isn't fair! There is no real reason why I shouldn't go. You say it will unsettle my mind—that there won't be other dances and gayeties. Then let me at least seize this one evening, while I can. I shall see what a ball is like. Mother, I have lived such a strange life! I know nothing. I cannot laugh and talk as other

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

girls do. You would not return the calls that people made when you came here, years ago, so I know no one—I have done and seen none of the things that other girls do and see. It makes me feel foolish—awkward, and I want to go! Oh, I do so want to go! The music and the flowers and the dancing and fun; and the dancing-room is such a lovely place—Mother, you will let me go? You won't spoil it all now when I was so sure? Say you have changed your mind, Mother!" But the voice, grown tremulous again in its last appeal, sank into a hopeless cadence on the final words. Audrey could see that she had failed to move her mother. She turned and went out of the room, fumbling for the door-handle, blinded by a sudden mist of tears.

Left alone, Susan sank onto the chair she had been dusting, as if strength had left her suddenly. She put up her hands to her face and sat silent.

Failure stared her in the face—utter, miserable failure. Her child was wretched, she hated her quiet life. To Susan, then, it seemed as if she could not go on with the daily round, that the end of everything had come. To her, Audrey's outburst was no mere girlish and natural longing for a little gayety: it was significant of far wider issues than that; it held tragedy in every vibrating word.

She rose at last, and mechanically picked up her duster.

"If Solomon's decision—was wrong—she would be better punished when the child grew up than if she had let him be cut in halves."

She muttered it as she went on with her dusting. She dusted aimlessly, going over the same places again and again, and leaving others untouched.

Up-stairs, on her little bed, Audrey lay and wept.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Amelia came to tell her that dinner was ready. She said she did not want any. Later Amelia reappeared, carrying a plate.

"Now, dearie, you're to eat a little. Why, how you've been crying! Just like me when I was your age. Girls have their troubles, but they blow over. You take after me, being so sensitive. Just tell Amelia now what it's all about."

Her little eyes were greedy with curiosity: not a word had Susan vouchsafed to her.

Audrey sat up, pushing back her hair; she turned a miserable, tear-stained face to Amelia.

"I'm not to go to the dance, after all, Amelia!"

"Lord save us! And why ever not?"

"Mother doesn't want me to go."

"Well, I never! And the dress half made and everything! I declare if it isn't too cruel! And what reason is there, I'd like to know? Why shouldn't you go?"

"Mother thinks it would unsettle me," she said, wearily.

"I'd go, dearie! That I would! I'll help you to get away myself, frightened as I am of Susan, only you must never let her know that I helped you—"

"You know I wouldn't go, Amelia," she interrupted, listlessly.

"Well, any girl of spirit would, and that I do say! And no one could wonder, either."

"Then I suppose I haven't any spirit. I can't eat that rice, Amelia. Do take it away."

She wanted Amelia to go, but Amelia had no intention of going: she was too much interested in the subject.

"She must have some reason," she said, and a gleam of sly speculation came into her face. "Do you know any of

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

the people who are coming to the dance, dearie?" she observed, with an overdone air of casualness.

"Some. The Barclays are going, and the rector and his wife, and a Miss Holmleigh who drove over once when I was there, and Mrs. Hartley-Dent is staying for it." She spoke dully, taking no particular interest in what she was saying.

But Amelia looked triumphant. *Now* she knew why Susan had walked a mile and a half to the Rectory that morning, just to ask a question about a new book of sermons! Oh, Susan was a deep one, but so was she!

She began to spoon up the rice Audrey had rejected.

"Perhaps—she doesn't think that Mrs. Hartley-Dent is fit company for you," she suggested, casually, and she cast a queer, frightened, yet eagerly excited look at Audrey.

Audrey looked at her surprised.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if all you hear is true—"

"Which it never is," interpolated Audrey, who felt pessimistical.

"She's a very fast lady. They do say she belongs to the Smart Set! They do!"

Had Amelia said she belonged to the most rabid society of anarchists, she could not have spoken with more shocked horror.

"Rubbish!" said Audrey, unimpressed.

"Rubbish or no rubbish, she isn't all she ought to be!" Amelia cried, her temper rising, and becoming as usual spiteful. "I'm sure I wonder Mrs. Barrington asks her to stay in the same house as those poor, innocent babes—"

"Don't be ridiculous, Amelia! The fact that she is a friend of Mrs. Barrington's proves that there is no truth

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

in what you have been saying. Please take that plate away."

"You're very highy-tighty, miss! Perhaps you've a sort of sympathy with her! I suppose *you* wouldn't be shocked to hear about the fancy-dress ball she went to as a mermaid, and her dress so indecent that—"

"Amelia, be quiet! I like Mrs. Hartley-Dent, and I will not have you repeat disgusting scandal about her. Leave the room at once!"

There was cold dignity in the gesture with which she pointed to the door, a dignity that cowed Amelia. She turned to obey, then stopped abruptly, her mouth falling open. Susan stood in the doorway, but she was looking at Audrey, not at Amelia. The look was so strange, there was such an almost mad jealousy in her face, that Amelia shuddered, though constitutionally incapable of understanding the agony that was producing the expression.

Audrey was staring across out of the window; she did not see her mother.

Susan turned and went down the passage into her own room. Guiltily, Amelia crept down to the kitchen and washed up the dinner-plates. But her hands shook; there was a queer blueness about her mouth. Once she put up her hand to her heart, and this time she did not lay it to her right side.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE frock had come. The dressmaker in Peterhampton regretted that it was too far advanced to permit of any change of plan, and so it came.

Audrey looked at it dry-eyed: all its soft fascination failed to draw one tear. She had cried all her tears away in that one outburst, and was now ashamed of herself. Her pride was up in arms. She felt that her mother was acting unfairly. She was living through a tragedy. She was very young, and the dance meant more than just a dance to her; it had been a dream, a fairy-story to look forward to; it had meant many wonderful things that were only half formulated in her heart. Its withdrawal from her eager anticipations meant the withdrawal of much of the beauty of her life just then.

But, although there was a new element in her bearing towards her mother—a certain coldness, and an absence of the old childish awe—sufficient of the old methods of thought still clung to her to prevent the idea of disobedience ever once entering her mind.

Amelia had suggested it, and it had been put aside as an absolute impossibility, as a suggestion so futile as to lack even interest.

She had written a little note to Marcia, stiff from its loyalty to her mother, explaining that she would not be able to come to the ball. She received in reply a charming

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

letter, which wound up by assuring her that if at any moment her mother should change her mind, every one would be delighted to see Audrey.

The morning of the dance woke in a soft haze of color. Audrey, unable to sleep, sat at the window and watched the wonderful light top the distant hills—spread till it flooded all the world. It had rained in the night, and there were little golden puddles everywhere; the trees and bushes and grass were hung with a million twinkling lights. The great peace of the world, alight with its own beauty, brought aching tears to her eyes. . . .

But a breeze, laden with the indescribable freshness of very early morning, blew the tears away, made her healthily ashamed of them. She stretched out her arms to the quiet hills, looming in the golden light, lit with a thousand soft colors—blues and grays and golds. . . .

“Dear old hills,” she murmured.

The light shone down gently on her pale face, lit more of its wonderful colors in her hair. She felt very good. She thrilled with good resolutions as she sat and watched and listened, and heard the world awake. She loved to hear the tiny sounds of stirring life; the great, beautiful earth seemed to be waiting for lazy folk to begin their day; it waited with such a patient, quiet that every tiniest sound and motion came to her as she sat and hearkened. She found herself murmuring some words she had read and loved a few days before in Marcia’s room:

*“Held her in peace: so that a whispering blade
Of grass, a wailful gnat, a bee bustling
Down in the bluebells, or a wren light rustling
Among sere leaves and twigs, might all be heard.”*

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Beneath her windows a bee was "bustling"; everywhere the birds were waking and beginning to sing. Presently louder sounds—sounds that carried with them a suggestion of humanity stirring at last—came to her. Dogs barked, cocks began to crow, the thud of a horse's hoofs passed down the road to the left of the house. Beyond the trees she saw smoke curling lazily up into the air, soft gray spirals losing themselves in the vivid blue. The world was awake; it was growing busy. A thrush flew past, carrying food in his beak. Again she thought of the thrush up in the may-tree many years ago. She was always thinking of those days now.

When she went down-stairs she went armed with brave resolution; she would try to put away the thought of the dance. She told herself, in the goodness born of the morning, that perhaps her mother had good and sufficient reason for her refusal, and she met her with a smile.

After breakfast she went out: she fought against the sadness that, subtly fed by the very beauty of the day, sought to creep upon her. And, intensifying the sadness, there was beyond it a tremendous power of joy—a joy quenched by the thought of what the evening would hold and what she would miss, a joy that unconsciously she recognized as being there; she breathed it forth when she murmured: "If only I were going to-night!"

She passed the row of neat little red cottages at the foot of the long hill. In the gardens the stocks and pinks were out; they scented the whole road. She drank in their fragrance as she went slowly past. Farther up the road she heard the sound of hoofs approaching.

"He's cantering very fast."

She could not see him, as he was coming up a road that,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

some way in front of her, branched off to the left. But suddenly the color leaped to her face, her heart began to beat rapidly. "It's old Squire Armcourt," she said, and unconsciously she spoke aloud.

Then the horse came trotting round the corner; he was a chestnut, and the sun gleamed on his coat, turning it to shining fire. . . . "You must never be frightened of any animal. Now get up and stroke her nose. . . ."

Involuntarily, the boyish voice of years ago in her ear, she half put out her hand to obey it. Then she laughed, and found herself looking up into Martin's serious face.

"It isn't the same horse," she said, in an odd little breathless voice. "It's dear old Redcap now."

"Why aren't you coming to-night?"

There was a hint of masterfulness in his tone; he was frowning. He stood looking down at her. He said:

"I was coming to ask you."

Then he gave a short laugh and a half apology.

"I suppose it was pretty cool! I never thought of that."

She did not reply. For a moment she could not. That tremendous power of joy which had lain dormant had awakened suddenly at his words, his look. The volume of it took away her breath. She could not speak; she could not meet his eyes.

He wanted her. She had seen and heard how much he wanted her. She patted the chestnut's neck. She said, at last:

"He doesn't like standing."

He said, gently:

"Will you tell me why you're not coming this evening?"

"Mother doesn't wish me to."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

His face was expressive; it was perhaps as well that she was not looking at him just then.

Mechanically he stroked the horse's head as he stood thinking.

"Do you want to come?"

She lifted her head.

"Oh yes!"

"Then—can't you come?" he said.

Her eyes widened.

"But—but how? Oh, you mean my mother might change her mind. She won't. I am quite sure."

He was silent a little while. She pressed her cheek against Redcap's neck, hiding her face. In her mind she was saying over and over again: "He wants me to go! H. wants me to go!"

"Audrey, you will come to-night?"

He bent his head to hers. "Say you will come somehow."

Again she was swept along on that warm tide of happiness. This time she met his eyes; she found them compelling.

"You must come," he said.

And suddenly she knew that she must obey him; nothing else mattered, no one counted, but him, in all the world.

"Yes," she said, steadily, "I will come."

The gravity of his face disappeared; he smiled down at her.

"That's right. Thanks awfully. It's no end good of you. What time will you come? We're dining early—"

"Not to dinner," she said.

His face fell.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Oh, can't you?"

She shook her head.

"I'll be at the Hall about eight o'clock."

"All right, if you can't come earlier. We'll send to fetch you about half-past seven. Will that do?"

"Please don't send for me. I—I shall be all right."

She saw that he did not realize the situation, and a new sensation crept into her heart; she felt a motherly desire to spare him all worry. She smiled up at him gently.

"That will be all right," she said. "I don't want anything to be sent for me."

"You're sure?"

"Quite sure."

"I'm off to Peterhampton to telephone about some of the food that seems to have gone astray. Good-bye till this evening." He mounted and trotted off down the road. She stood watching him. He turned at the corner and waved his hat. "Don't forget! *Six!* You promised!" he shouted.

She gave a little soft laugh—she knew that she had never promised him so many dances.

"How beautifully he manages Redcap!"

But the thought was only on the outside, as it were, outside the whirling thought that was so full of joy. And yet there was a certain new restfulness, a sense of having given up her own will to a stronger, and a glorying in the deed.

It was later that fear of her mother obtruded on her happiness, but she did not waver; she had promised. She had had to promise. She did not repent. She would do it again. But she felt that she could not go home and face her mother at the dinner-table. So she walked on for a

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

while, and did not reach home till an hour after the dinner-time.

Susan said merely:

"You are late."

"Yes," she replied.

She did not add that she was sorry; she could not bring herself to act a part. Yet she did not feel ashamed; she was so sure that she must go to the dance that the deceit hardly hurt her; she felt almost that she would not care should her mother discover that she was going—she could not stop her now.

Susan said no more about her being late. She had grown more silent, more unbending than before, during these last few days. Only her eyes questioned Audrey feverishly, her lips remained locked. The tremendous effort of will required told on her physically, and there was a weariness in her face, as if she fought through the long nights and was very tired.

That evening Audrey went up to her room. Susan was in the kitchen. All Audrey's courage had evaporated; she held her head high, but her hands shook as she began to take the hair-pins out of her hair. The color burned in her cheeks; she dropped her arms to her sides in despair.

She went to the window and leaned out, trying to be calm. She watched the shadows lengthening over the hills, turned her face to the dying breeze. She went back to the unflattering little mirror and proceeded to get ready. Her door possessed no lock; she knew that at any moment her mother might come into the room. The excitement that shook her from head to foot was painful.

When she slipped on the white frock she gave a little

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

gasp of surprise. She had never had anything the least like it. She stood staring into the mirror, craning her neck to see more of herself, turning this way and that. She patted and pulled out her hair; she wished for jewelry, for a fan. Then she gave a sudden little laugh, and she could not have told why, only—only the dress was so very pretty. . . .

They had bought long white gloves that day in Peterhampton. She had no shoes, except little flat-heeled black ones. She stared at them doubtfully, but she had nothing better. She was so absorbed with her dressing, and the excitement and terror lest her mother should come in, that she did not at first notice how dark the room was growing. But presently the dark was pierced with a zigzag flash of light, and, with a start, she realized that a storm was beginning to rage. Over the hills the thunder was growling angrily. She stood at the window and looked out, anxiety driving out, for the moment, thought of her mother. The hills were almost swallowed up in what at first she thought was a mist, but she soon saw that it was heavy rain. The next moment it was pattering down onto her window-sill. For a minute she quailed sensitively, taking the storm, unconsciously, as a further deterrent. Then she set her lips and turned from the window. Nothing could stop her—she had promised. As she stretched up to take down her old mackintosh, Susan's voice cried up the staircase:

“Audrey, is your window shut?”

There was a pause that to Susan was scarcely noticeable, but that to Audrey, suddenly sick and white with terror, was of agonized duration.

“The rain isn't coming in, Mother.”

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

“What do you say?”

She drew in a deep breath, then spoke clearly and loudly:

“The rain isn’t coming in at my window, Mother.”

She stood staring at the door, unable to think of any means to keep her mother from coming up to her. The awfulness of her disobedience came home to her in its full strength for the first time. But still she had no thought of breaking her word.

But Susan did not come up-stairs. She knew as well as Audrey did what night it was; it is doubtful whether the dance had not been in her thoughts as much as in Audrey’s during these last days. She, too, had no intention of altering her mind, but, before the new coldness in Audrey’s manner, she felt a strange diffidence; she was not quite at her ease in Audrey’s presence, and to her stern and upright soul the feeling was very near akin to torture. Yet for years she had foreseen it, dimly, as a horror which she pushed from her with iron resolution. There had been times when it had come very near, when it had almost taken tangible shape, and had only been driven away into the mist of the future by the innocence of Audrey’s face, by some loving word or gesture. But now to her it seemed that there was accusation in Audrey’s gravity; she read suspicion into her coldness. To her there was no longer the old childish innocence, the old childish content in her, which alone could drive the horror away. Jealously sensitive where Audrey was concerned, she began irresistibly to turn all her former excuses into reproaches; they no longer held any semblance of comfort or truth. But as she turned away from the foot of the staircase, Audrey’s clear voice, with that

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

new note of hardness in it, ringing in her ears, she said:

“I would do it all again.”

Without, the rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Audrey, looking from her window, saw a wet world smiling up at her. She doubled up her skirt, fastening it with numerous pins, threw on her rain-cloak, and, slipping her shoes into one of its large pockets, crept across to the door and listened. Even the thought of Martin, of her promise, of her mother's injustice, failed to make this moment anything but distasteful to her. The house was very quiet. Then she heard Amelia address some remark to her mother, and her mother reply. They were in the kitchen; but she knew, by the ease with which she heard what was said, that the door was open. Suppose she were asked where she was going? In fact, she would surely be asked; Susan always liked to know where she was going. She could say, “Through Monk's lane.” It would be true. But even so— She went back to the mirror, trying to judge whether to others she would look different from usual. To herself there was an unmistakable difference. She gazed earnestly at the vivid reflection in the glass. . . . Why did she look so different? It was her old mackintosh, her usual hat. . . .

Once more she went to the door. This time she heard another voice; it was old Rebecca Day's; she was at the back door and Susan was talking to her.

With sudden desperate courage she dropped the piece of paper on which she had written, “I have gone to the ball,” down onto the table, and ran straight down the stairs and out of the hall door. With an oddly childish complexity of emotions she refused to close the door quietly

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

behind her, but shut it quite loudly, receiving momentarily a gleam of comfort from the act. She would not run, and her legs felt strangely stiff and weighted, rather as they had felt in childish nightmares, when escape from some terrible fate depended entirely upon their prowess. She walked quite slowly, breathing hard, feeling her mother close behind her at every step, hearing her peremptory voice bidding her stop. But once at the foot of the hill, and out of sight of the house, her pulses quieted down a little, and a joyous anticipation and triumph set her in a sudden glow of altogether different feelings.

It seemed to her, newly joyful, a beautiful omen that a rainbow should glow in the sky above her.

Did she remember the steps of the waltz? Joyously, a demurely clad figure, she twirled in the road. No one was in sight.

What should she talk about to her partners? Oh, how terrible! But hadn't she read somewhere that men always liked to talk about themselves? And that they liked you to listen and look sympathetic? "I wonder," mused Audrey, "how you look sympathetic? A smile when they're being funny, and gravity when they're not?" And just an "Oh, really? How interesting!" "Yes?" "No?" at intervals. It shouldn't be very difficult. But suppose—fear took her—suppose she were to dance with a young man who didn't want to talk! Oh, ghastly possibility! She was so ignorant, such a hopeless country bumpkin. How terrible to think she had never seen London! Dear, old, wonderful, beautiful London! The weight of her ignorance pressed upon her. But not for long. Her frock was so pretty, and really it was so becoming that she looked—well, a little bit pretty herself—and Martin did

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

not mind her ignorance. One day he had said, "You have the most original way of looking at things; you make everything so jolly interesting when you talk!" Yes, he had! He had! And he had said she danced "divinely!" Oh, what did her partners matter? She was going to a ball—a real, live, lovely ball! She stopped, dismayed, when she turned a corner, and saw the state of Monk's lane. The heavy shower had churned up the mud, the deep ruts were full of water. However, her dress was well pinned up. She plunged in, nervously afraid of splashing her skirt. And slowly the benignity of the skies changed again luridly to anger. She saw the fresh storm coming, and started, futilely, to run. There was nowhere to run to. She watched the great black clouds spread; saw the sun disappear, his exit cruelly hastened by a great brooding cloud, which seemed to swallow him up in a fury.

Then the rain came splashing down, big drops, few and far between at first, then a steady downpour. She cowered in a ditch, beneath a blackberry hedge, till the storm was over, then, wet and cold, she pursued her way. The appalling state of her boots depressed her; she was convinced that all the freshness of her frock would be gone; her ignorance and lack of small talk assumed gigantic proportions. But she pressed on, a feeling of intense loneliness growing upon her. The evening had turned cold; her mackintosh was thin; she shivered as she hurried on. It seemed hours to her before at last she stood before the gates of the Hall. There a shyness came upon her; she could not enter that way—some early visitor might drive up just as she reached the house. She turned aside and entered by the garden door, through which

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Martin had hailed her that afternoon when Bobbie had been naughty.

Striving after a little boldness, she entered the garden; the evening had turned so stormy that it was almost dark. She made her way to the hall door, but when nearly there she stood still, staring into the dining-room. They were still at dinner. She could see them all. Marcia, in palest green—oh, how beautiful she looked! And Mrs. Pat—her eyes became riveted on Mrs. Pat. Her frock was indescribable; vaguely Audrey knew that it was a glitter of wondrous peacock hue. Slowly her gaze moved on to another woman, a tall young woman all in white—masses of lace and chiffon. There were others—all in beautiful frocks, all with beautiful jewels, all laughing and talking. There were exquisite flowers on the table. Martin was bending towards his right-hand neighbor, a bright-faced little dark woman, who evidently found no difficulty in talking. There were diamonds in her hair. . . . She was making Martin laugh. . . .

An agony of utter misery gripped her in a cold grasp. What had she to do with those beautiful, gay people in there? No one wanted her, an insignificant, dowdy little country girl! They would laugh at her dress—her dress which she had thought so beautiful a little while ago! They would wonder why she had come. . . . Martin did not care. Why should he? He did not want her to come now. He had forgotten her. Oh, how they laughed! How happy they were! And how the diamonds flashed! And Martin did not mind that the little dark woman wore such a dreadfully low-cut gown. And Mrs. Pat's was worse. Well, she supposed she was a prude; it was probably only another example of her

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

awful ignorance. But she was glad Marcia did not wear gowns like that.

Mrs. Pat's voice rang out in a few lines of a little French song; she was evidently talking of some play to the man next her. What a dark, clever face he had! Never, never, would she dare speak to him! No, she would be too horribly out of place among them. She looked down at her wet mackintosh, old and dingy; at her muddy boots; she put up her hand and felt her wet hair and hat. She gave a miserable little laugh that left her throat aching. Tears smarted in her eyes, but did not fall. She shivered in a deadly loneliness. For the first time she remembered to recognize the smell that had come from the kitchen at home as she had run down the stairs; it was the lemon pudding, made with jam and sweet sauce, that she was so fond of, and that Amelia could not make. Her mother was making it for supper—her favorite pudding.

The tears fell with a splash. . . .

They had nearly finished dinner. What should she do? Yes, they were rising. She shrank back, shaking with cold and nervous wretchedness. . . . Martin was laughing again. He was making a low bow to the little dark woman. She was doubling her fist, pretending to punch him. She wished she could hear what they were saying; the windows were open, but she could not distinguish words at that distance. Mrs. Pat had said something funny—they were all laughing. *She* never said funny things. . . .

Now they were all gone—all the women; the men were still there. Martin was grave now; he rose and left the room. Was he going after the little dark woman? Couldn't he wait a few minutes?

A tall figure came out onto the steps. It was Mar-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

tin. A footman passed in the hall behind him; he turned.

"Green, has Miss Fielding come yet?"

"No, sir."

The lump in her throat grew, suddenly, into a tremendous thing; the tears came raining down. She ran forward, rubbing the tears away with her handkerchief. Through the night a shaky little whisper reached him.

"Mr. Jocelyn."

He turned sharply.

"You? Why—and you're wet! You never *walked*, did you? What happened? Did the horse go lame, or a wheel part company?"

Her cold little hand, in its wet glove, was held close in his big warm clasp. He was looking down at her anxiously.

"You must come along into the study—only room where there's a fire. Dick's a most awful old salamander, you know. You must be so beastly cold and miserable. I wish you had let me send something to fetch you."

Her hand was tucked comfortably under his arm now; he was talking without looking at her.

He had seen that something was wrong, and was giving her time to pull herself together. They met no one as they crossed the hall.

A little sob, the aftermath of her wretchedness, rose to her throat as they entered the study. The lamp was turned low, a big fire blazed in the wide grate, flashes of flame flickered all round the brown room.

"There, now, you sit here." He pulled a huge easy-chair to the grate. "Let me take off your coat first. I say, I hope the frock underneath is all right."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Oh, I forgot it was all pinned up!" She laughed and blushed as she began pulling out the pins. She turned down her skirt and laughed again; she laughed breathlessly, a note of nervousness in her voice. "A—ball is very exciting, isn't it?" she said. "I—I feel—so happy—" The last word stuck a little.

"You will feel happier soon, when you are warm and dry," he said, quietly.

He flung her coat onto a chair.

"Has the rain gone through? You're sure? Not anywhere? Your neck?"

She put up her hand to her throat.

"It's quite dry," she said, shyly.

"Your hair is wet, but it doesn't look as if it will need any of Marcia's waving arrangements. Now, let me take off your shoes. They're soaked through. Poor little soul!"

She was not sure of the last words; he said them in a low voice as he bent over her feet.

She drew her foot away.

"Oh, please—oh, please—"

He was kneeling on the rug. He glanced up swiftly, a smile of memory flashing across his face.

"You used to say that years ago! 'Oh, please—oh, please'—and I used to pick you up in my arms and hug you. Oh, what a dear, dear little girl you were in those days, Audrey!"

She nestled back shyly; the big brown leather chair swallowed her slim white figure up jealously.

He said, in a queer voice:

"I could do it still! You're not much bigger than you were then."

"My dignity is," she said, with a little laugh.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

He had her shoes off now; he was kneeling on the rug looking at them.

"Oh, do hide them somewhere," she entreated. "Horrid, muddy, disgraceful things! And they've made your hands all muddy. I'm so sorry!"

He took out his handkerchief and wiped his hands. Then he looked up at her earnestly.

"I shall keep this handkerchief always," he said, "and never have it washed!"

"Oh, how funny you are!" She laughed heartlessly. "I don't think mud-stains are a bit romantic."

"Don't you?" he said, with immense dignity. "Are your feet wet?"

She curled up her toes beneath the chair.

"Not an atom."

"Let me feel."

"They're not, really."

"I don't believe you."

"Oh, how rude you are!"

"You were rude to me just now. You laughed at me."

She held out a foot.

"No, it isn't wet," he conceded, unwillingly. "Now I'll go and fetch Marcia."

He rose slowly.

"When did you dine?" he asked, suddenly

"Oh, we dine at two o'clock."

"When did you have supper, then?"

"I didn't want any."

"Ah!"

She looked up at him as he stood before the fire.

"You're like Robin the day I had my first riding-lesson—such a long way up!"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

He ignored her frivolity.

"What would you like? Look here, I'll tell the boys you're here, and we'll have a nice little party all on our own. I'll go and forage."

He started for the door.

"Mr. Jocelyn! Really, I don't want anything to eat! I honestly don't!"

"I dare say; but you've got to eat something. It's perfectly ridiculous. You're as white as a little ghost."

"I'm not. That's only because—because—"

He turned back.

"Will you just tell me why you walked?" he asked, gently.

She hung her head.

"I—I came—without mother's permission."

"I see. She wouldn't give in, then?"

"I didn't ask her again. I knew she wouldn't."

"Then you meant to walk all along?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me? I'd have fetched you—been at the end of—" He broke off. "No," he said, quietly. "I see."

She smiled at him gratefully.

"It would have made it so much worse, wouldn't it? Oh, I'm glad you understand! You always did understand!"

"Did I? I think I was a beastly cub! And now I'll fetch you something to eat."

"And you go back to the others," she said. "I'm sure you want to go back to the others."

He paused in the doorway and looked at her.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Audrey, you used to be such an honest little girl once upon a time!"

When he had gone she jumped up, and ran across the room to a quaint old mirror hanging on the wall. She stood on tiptoes and peered at her reflection. Then she frowned, and sighed.

"I look washed-out, and my hair's all mad. But he doesn't want to go back to that dark little woman! He doesn't! He doesn't!"

She went to her rain-coat and fumbled in the pockets for her shoes. One shoe was there, but only one. Hurriedly she searched, poking her fingers into every corner; then she knelt and looked beneath the chair, round the room, but the shoe was not there. She had lost it on her way; probably it had fallen from her pocket when she sheltered in the ditch. Now what was she to do? The door opened and Martin came in.

"Marcia's coming in a moment. The boys are bathing, or saying their prayers, or something. It's all right. I've enlisted Williamson's fatherly heart on your side; he's going to bring you something to eat himself."

"I wish you wouldn't trouble. Can you lend me a shoe?"

"A shoe?" He smiled. "Haven't you brought yours? You're right only to ask for one!"

"I've lost only one."

"Oh, well, Marcia will lend you a pair; it will have to be a pair of Jimmy's, I should think. Are you warm now?"

"Yes, thank you."

He looked at her dissatisfiedly.

"I don't believe you've had any lunch, either! You look starved."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Oh yes, I did," she said, with guilty haste. "I wasn't very hungry, that's all."

"You need some one to look after you! A man, with some common-sense."

There was a pause then. Martin poked the fire.

"Mr. Jocelyn!"

"Yes?"

"Will you tell me the truth if I ask you something?"

She was standing before him; she looked up at him very earnestly.

He said, impulsively:

"I don't think I could help it."

"Well, you see, it's like this. When I put this frock on this evening I thought it was beautiful, and then—then I saw Mrs. Pat and Mrs. Barrington and—and others—"

He interrupted suddenly.

"You couldn't see into the drawing-room from where you were. When did you see them?"

Slowly the red crept into her face. In her earnestness she had forgotten that he might ask that.

"I—I had been there—a little while—before you came out. I saw them at dinner." Involuntarily she took a step nearer to him as she spoke; she glanced round the room with a little scared look in her face. "It was so cold and wet out there," she said.

"Of course it was. It was ridiculous of you to loiter there. I expect you'll have an awful cold after it!"

He spoke roughly, but, sensitive as she was, she was not at all hurt.

"No wonder you're so pale! Come closer to the fire. Sit down. Now, what was I to tell the truth about?"

"My frock. You see, when I saw those others—oh,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

well, mine is so different"—she looked at him very worried and anxious—"I want to know if—if it look sat all dowdy to you, who are used to the other sort. I mean, does it matter *awfully* that it's so much plainer?" She stood a little way off, her eyes scanning his face anxiously. "Please don't pay me any compliments," she said, a note of impatience in her voice.

"It's rather difficult not to. No, you're certainly not dowdy." He was very grave. "Mrs. Pat's dress would look ridiculous on you. So would Marcia's. Yours is perfect, I think."

Her face was radiant.

"Really? You're not saying it just because you want to be polite?"

"I don't want to be polite at all. I'd much sooner be able to tell you, with honesty, that you've ruined your dress loitering out in the garden, that it's crushed and spoiled. I can't think why it isn't, either."

"Dearest! How sweet of you to come, after all!" A blue-dressing-gowned Jimmy threw herself into Audrey's arms.

"How awfully sweet!" from a blue-gowned Tommy.

Then a little "How-do-you-do?" from Dickie.

Williamson, big and benign, appeared with an appetizing little dinner.

"What fun!" Jimmy remarked. "And I know you well enough to make personal remarks, don't I? I do so like your frock, dear. Oh, *will* you wear my pearl neck-aliss?"

"And my brooch!"

"And mine!"

Exit of three blue figures.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Audrey was decked in the jewels. Martin left the room for a while, and returned with a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley.

"I think they're most like you," he murmured, as she took them.

She was not pale now, but the reaction brought, every now and then, a little breathless catch to her throat. She was so happy and warm; they were all so marvellously kind to her. Dickie, eying her earnestly, opined that though she was not *quite* so beautiful as her mother, still she was *very* beautiful.

"Not quite!" Audrey laughed. "No, not quite! Oh, Dickie, Dickie, I'm so happy!"

Marcia came in as she spoke.

"I couldn't get away before. Dear, I am so glad you have come. Let me look at you. Well, you look pretty well, I think, if you have been through all the terrible hardships Martin hinted at. I expected to find you just recovering from a swoon."

Audrey looked a little abashed.

Marcia bent and kissed her.

"You're sweet, dear," she whispered. "I wish you belonged to me."

"I've only one shoe, and my hair is awful!" Audrey laughed, because that was not what she wanted to do or say at all.

"Your hair is easily remedied, but—who will have a shoe to fit you, I wonder?"

"It's like Cinderella. Martin, you're the Prince, go and find her her shoe!" cried Jimmy, dancing around in her dressing-gown.

"Oh yes; go quickly, Cousin Martin!"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Martin glanced down humorously at himself, then at the window.

"In the days of chivalry," he said, firmly, "it never rained."

"Mrs. Pat's shoes are teeny-weeny," said Dickie, thoughtfully.

At that moment Mrs. Pat herself came in.

"I heard my name! 'Who steals my name steals trash.' Holloa, child, what a white dream you are, to be sure—the sort of dream good people have in the early morning."

"She has lost a shoe," Marcia said. "And we were wondering if you could lend her a pair. Mine are too large."

Mrs. Pat stuck out a tiny foot in a silver shoe, and considered it.

"If that child takes as small a shoe as I, I'll never speak to her again. I'm noted for the narrowness of my feet. It's been mentioned in the papers. Martin, take it off!"

He slipped it off and brought it to Audrey. Jimmy ran at him with a cushion.

"Put it on here, Cousin Martin! The Prince did. You sit down, Audrey. Cinderella did."

"So we're enacting Cinderella, are we? Marcia, are you and I the ugly sisters? So the shoe does fit. Martin, come and put it on again. How now, Jim? I'm Cinderella, too."

"You've had a husband, so you can't be."

"That makes me all the more fascinating and dangerous! This is Cinderella up to date, you know. Miss Fielding, if you're not frightened that in my jealousy I shall stick a dagger into you, come with me and I'll lend you some shoes."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Thank you very much."

Audrey followed her from the room. At the door she paused a moment and looked back; she had been very happy there; there was reluctance in the poise of her figure.

"I don't want to go," she murmured, childishly.

Martin heard and understood. He said, bending his head to hers:

"I wish you would stay here forever—with me."

She had been looking into the room, noting how the fire-light flickered on Marcia's frock, on her diamonds, on Jimmy's hair, on the silver upon the tray Williamson had brought. She had been loving the room, now she glanced up at him startled; the red leaped to her cheeks at his tone. She could think of nothing to say; her eyes looked into his, fascinated by their passionate earnestness. She was frightened at the sudden glimpse he had given her of his soul; she shrank back timidly.

His face changed; he smiled tenderly.

"Don't be frightened," he said, gently. "How many dances will you give me?"

She said, feeling strange:

"I don't know."

"You'll let me choose?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

"And you—you won't—" She spoke impulsively, then stopped, growing red.

"No, I won't—to-night," he said.

She turned and ran blindly up the stairs and into Mrs. Pat.

"I never spoil sport," Mrs. Pat observed, "which should

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

be put in the scale on the light side for me some day. You'll want white shoes, of course."

"I've black stockings."

"Oh, then I'll lend you stockings, too. White looks better."

"How kind you are!" Audrey said, earnestly.

They had entered Mrs. Pat's room. She turned and looked down into Audrey's face.

"I believe you mean it! What an odd child you are! Why, my friends borrow my handkerchiefs, my scent, my money, my wraps, and forget to return them, too! And I do the same to them. Hitherto my shoes have been immune, because they wouldn't fit them. Lucille, bring me some white shoes and stockings."

In the full light Audrey saw for the first time the magnificence of her gown. She stared at her fascinated; even the lines about her eyes fascinated her.

"Oh, you are wonderful!" she exclaimed, in a low voice. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you did suddenly produce a dagger!"

"You little cat! You mean that I look wicked! I'm an angel, child, a saint — St. Patrick, as some of the witty young men of to-day call me. How old are you?"

"Nearly twenty."

"You're a baby. How old do you think I am, Baby Fielding?"

It was asked lightly. Audrey did not know that Mrs. Pat, possessed by a horror of advancing years, was waiting breathlessly for her answer. She studied her seriously; to her innocent eyes the beautiful make-up was a beautiful complexion.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I suppose you are Marcia's age," she said—"thirty-one."

"You're a clever baby, after all. Now, which shoes would you like?"

Lucille was holding out a pair of simple little white satin shoes and a gorgeous pair of embroidered gold and white.

"Oh, not those, thank you! I'd never dare dance in anything so lovely. May I wear these satin ones?"

Arrayed in white shoes and stockings, she slipped across into Marcia's room to rearrange her hair.

Presently in came Dick.

"I say, old girl, that beastly stud is digging into my neck— Oh, I beg your pardon! I thought you were Marcia."

"Do fine feathers make fine birds to that extent?" she laughed. "Please don't go. I've done my hair."

She slipped past him out into the corridor. At the head of the stairs she came upon a fat white bundle, golden-tipped, huddled up against the wall.

"Bob's—goin'—down—to see—ole Audrey," observed the bundle, drowsily, and without looking up.

"Duckie, sweet, loveums, I'm here," said Audrey, utterly absurd out of the exuberance of her heart, and hugging the bundle to her.

Bobbie's yellow head fell against her shoulder. Bobbie smiled seraphically.

"The dear Lord has a party, too, to-night. He said He was awful sorry He couldn't ask me, an' I said, 'Pray don't mention it. I ker-wite understand.' Heaven's gettin' awful full, I 'spect, 'cause there's all the ole Bible peoples an' all the ole History peoples, too . . ." Her voice trailed off sleepily.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Bobbie, I love you so, I can't leave you," Audrey said.

"Every one 'dores ole Bob," cooed the young person; amiably.

"Conceited little duck. You're rather like a duck—so soft—"

*"Now lay me in my lickle bed,
Dear angels watch about my head,
An' homeward come
With beat of drum
An' a rum-tum-tum—"*

sang Bobbie, somewhat mixed—

"An' a rum-tum-tummy—"

Bob's tummy is cold!" She opened reproachful blue eyes. "Holloa, Dad!"

Dick was coming down the corridor:

"Why, you bad sinner, you ought to be in bed. Give her to me, Audrey."

"Bob's tum—ruzzle—guzzle, Daddy! Be a ole bear in my neck."

Audrey went with him to Bobbie's bedroom, whence she had escaped unobserved. By the time they arrived there Bobbie was fast asleep. He laid her down gently, and covered her up.

"Oh, what a little angel she looks!" Audrey whispered.

He shook his head, raising his eyebrows humorously.

"Don't encourage me," he said. "She's said several good things to-day, but I won't repeat them to a soul. If you only knew what a strict watch a fond father has to keep over his tongue. And all the time I'm convinced that *my* children really do say and do things that are

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

clever and funny and altogether wonderful. Every fool's convinced of the same thing about his uninteresting children; that's the worst of it."

"But the boys really are quite different from other children," she assured him. "Do tell me all the good things they say. I love to hear them."

"You're a bad little girl," he reproved her, leading the way from the room. "I'm due down-stairs long ago. No; I'm stern with my babbling tongue. A fellow told me a story the other day of his little boy. He said, 'You know, my Archie is the most wonderful little chap! We're afraid sometimes whether his brain isn't too precocious, he's so bright and cute! Now I'll give you an instance. The other day he was trotting along beside me; we were going through one of my fields, and presently the little chap looks up at me and says, "Moo-cow." I didn't think anything of it at the time, but when we got home I mentioned it to Maude. She looked excited. "Which field was it?" she asked. I told her. "Why, George," she said, "you know Buttercup has been in that field lately!" She rang for the nurse, and asked her if she had taken Master Archie along that way lately, and she had! She had, really! Now, there's a marvellous intelligence for you! Look at the power of reasoning, and of memory! And he's not three years old, yet, you know.' There, and that's what I've got to guard against," Dick finished, as they entered the drawing-room.

After that the evening became fairyland for Audrey. She found herself laughing and talking without any trouble at all. Her diffidence vanished when she discovered that she was obliged to send partners away. She laughed when it struck her suddenly that she was chattering to the man

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

with the dark clever face, to whom she had been so sure she could never say a word. And he wanted another dance, so he wasn't bored. And every one was so gay and nice and kind, and she hadn't forgotten any of the dances at all. But she found herself unconsciously dividing the evening into parts, and it was Martin's dances that headed the divisions. Martin danced so beautifully, and he was so kind, and he looked at her so—so gently.

Only the Professor frowned.

He looked hopelessly out of place there, and his presence exercised a good many minds. He refused to dance, pronouncing it an "undignified and unhealthy form of exercise." Marcia had asked him for the sake of his wife, who had an incongruous fondness for balls, and was pathetically grateful to any one who was kind enough to dance with her. She had no sense of time at all, and was very awkward, but she adored any and every dance.

"Do you know," Martin said to Audrey, "I read something to-day that applies to you."

"What was it?"

"Dancing should give you the idea of a lightness and a suppleness that are not of the body. The sole merit of the arts . . . is to make the soul imaginable by means of the body."

"I think it's unkind to look at Mrs. Forbes while you say that."

"I wasn't looking at Mrs. Forbes. I may have been looking through her."

"That's worse. Mrs. Pat would tell you that no woman likes a man to look through her."

"I'm sure Mrs. Forbes wouldn't mind. It's not so bad as having some one always looking over your head."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Poor Mrs. Forbes. Can you think why she married the Professor?"

"Well, he wasn't always such a bombastic old fool. My father and he were quite chums years ago. Anyway, I think it's just as much a problem why he married her!"

"You are ungallant."

"I've danced with her once to-night, and I'm to do it again. I disdain to annotate those facts."

"She knows she can't dance. It must feel queer and horrid to be so humble and meek, don't you think?"

"Ghastly; but I'd just as soon dance those dances with her as any one else."

"Really? Now you are gallant."

"It's the truth. None of the dances matter except four. I feel just as if they're not real, as if I'm a mechanical thing that's been wound up to perform certain steps and say certain things, while the real me is a sort of smothered volcano—"

"I'm terrified of volcanoes," she put in hurriedly.

"There won't be an eruption to-night."

"Don't you think earthquakes must be the most terrible things in the world? Nowhere to run to—you can't get away from them. Just the great earth opening and hugging you up. Oh, awful!"

"I wish I was an earthquake," Martin said, absurdly.

And then they both laughed.

Such little things made them laugh that night, and among the little things was the Professor's dour expression.

But as Mrs. Forbes panted along beside her husband on their way home a few hours later, he muttered spitefully to himself:

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I wonder what Hilary Jocelyn would say! They wouldn't laugh and ignore me if they knew what I know!"

"What do you say, dear?"

"Nothing! Nothing! John Fielding was that girl's father, wasn't he?"

"Oh yes, if you mean Audrey—"

"Whom else should I mean? So John Fielding was her father!" He gave an unpleasant chuckle. "And Hilary Jocelyn never forgets! Not he! That young lady will have to climb down several pegs if she intends to be the future Mrs. Martin Jocelyn. He'll want careful handling—very careful handling! Laugh at me, do they? Um—I may find occasion to write to Hilary Jocelyn—I say I *may* find occasion to write to him. We will see."

"Full of wonderful thoughts even after a ball," pondered his humble little spouse, whose feet ached, but whose temper was as good as it always was.

"Audrey, the Letheridge's pass your house, and will have room for you in their brougham."

Martin interposed, frowning:

"I'm going to drive her home."

"Dear boy, Mrs. Letheridge proffered her brougham, and I accepted."

"That will do beautifully," Audrey put in, swiftly.

Marcia smiled at her.

"You're sure you won't stay?"

"Yes, quite, thank you."

"Look here, Marcia, Miss Fielding promised that—"

"Oh no!" Audrey said. "I only said—"

"Fight it out between yourselves," Marcia observed serenely, and walked away.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Martin said, "I'm sorry I asked you to let me drive you home. Had I known how very objectionable the prospect would be to you, I shouldn't have thought of asking you."

For a moment she quailed; he looked so big, so cold, and angry.

Then the womanhood in her childish body asserted itself. She held her head high, and gave a careless little laugh.

"It certainly would have been objectionable if you meant to be so bad-tempered," she said.

They were in the conservatory. It struck her with terror that his face was white—it showed so white against the palm behind his head. And the blue of his eyes was steely. She was afraid of him.

"Shall we go back to the ball-room?" she said.

"No."

She raised her eyebrows.

"Really, you are very rude, Mr. Jocelyn. I wish to go back."

"To get rid of me? Your next partner hasn't come to claim you yet. But, of course, if you wish it—"

"I—I want a bit of that cherry-blossom first," she said, hurriedly.

He moved away, and plucked her a spray.

"Is that enough?"

"Yes, thank you."

She took a long while fastening it into her frock. He stood by quite silent.

She broke out, petulantly:

"Why don't you say something? I don't want to talk. You talk."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Awfully good floor, isn't it? And good band, too. Did you see that little Embrook come a cropper? He went down, and bounced up again like a ball—"

"All my partners have said that."

"Have they? I'm sorry. Shall we go back now?"

"Yes."

She took the flower from her frock.

"I don't like it there," she said, and, always tender with flowers, stuck it into the damp mould of the pot beside her. "Now I've made my finger-tips mouldy," she laughed.

She greeted the weedy youth who approached with a dazzling smile. As they moved away together Martin heard her say, enthusiastically: "I simply adore this waltz!"

Throughout it she talked and laughed, but her eyes were strained. In her heart was a terrifying woe: it seemed to her that the end of all things had come. She had never dreamed that Martin could look like that. He looked as if—almost as if he hated her! His face was as cold as ice—

"Yes, oh, yes, I love flowers! My favorites? Oh, I don't know. Almost, I think, roses. But I love them all . . ."

He must—almost—hate her, if he could look at her like that. And he had looked so handsome, too—

"Did he say that really? How lovely! Isn't it wonderful what queer things people say? I think children's sayings are the best, don't you? The little Barringtons do say the funniest things. Did you ever hear what Jimmy said about church? . . ."

She wished that horrible ache would not keep climbing up to her throat. And she was so tired. What an inter-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

minable waltz it was. Had she been in the wrong? But she had not really promised him that he should drive her home; she had only said it was very kind of him, and she hated to be so much trouble; and then when Marcia suggested that she should go home with the Letheridges, what *could* she say?

"No, really? Tell me some more."

She had hurt him, and all because of her own petty feeling that she must not seem anxious to have him drive her home.

Sternly she took herself to task. She asked herself—would she have agreed so eagerly to Marcia's proposition had Martin, her promised escort, been a woman? Her conscience answered her plainly in the negative. In that case, presupposing Martin a woman friend, she would have hesitated, and made it clear to him—her—that she was only thinking of agreeing to save him—her—trouble. So she had been despicably self-conscious and petty. She thought it all out in her serious way while the youth beside her told her his ambitions.

She scourged herself for her pettiness; she was so inexperienced that she could not understand it, could not define any motive for it.

"I will tell him I am sorry."

Her eyes, at last, sought him across the room. The next minute Martin was beside her.

"I say, Bertram, will you let me speak to Miss Fielding? I have a message for her from Mrs. Barrington."

The weedy youth grew faintly pink, he looked up, hesitating. Martin looked down.

"Oh—oh, certainly," said the weedy youth, and vanished.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Will you come back to the conservatory?" Martin said.
"Yes."

He found their old place, an odd little unexpected nook that no one else seemed to have discovered. Then he turned to her. He said, with a sort of simple strength that she loved:

"I was a brute. Will you forgive me?"

She gave a little tremulous laugh.

"I—I was going to tell you that—that I was sorry," she said, childishly.

"You! Good God, child, don't do that! Why should you let me drive you home? You're too good to me always, only—I couldn't live, I think, unless you were, Audrey."

There was a quivering silence.

Beyond the palms, above the tinkling of the fountain, a woman's laugh came to them. Audrey started, and spoke. She never knew afterwards what she said.

She said, in a strained voice:

"I do like a fountain, don't you?"

He did not answer. For a minute he was silent, then he spoke very gently:

"Audrey, why are you frightened of me? I'll be so quiet, dear, I won't touch you, only I must tell you now—I can't keep it back any longer. I know you don't care—yet, but—I want you to promise you will try—that's all—just to try. Sometimes I've thought you're fond of me—a little. It's no good my saying I'm not worth you. It goes so deep, I can't say it. If you knew what you are to me—"

He stopped abruptly. Emboldened by his quiet voice she cast a fleeting glance at his face, and above all the

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

turmoil, above the rapture that was making her heart's beating almost choke her, and so was almost pain, she received a shock that sent all thought of herself from her. For his face was white, and she realized dimly by the lines round his mouth what his determination not to scare her was costing him. She gave a little cry—"Oh, Martin, don't look like that! I do love you! Oh, I do!"

"And you'll never be frightened of me again?"

"No."

"I'm terrified of you," he declared.

And she laughed gayly.

"Where is my little piece of cherry-blossom?" she said, peering into the fern-pot where she had planted it, because, in spite of her brave "No," of just now, she found the fern-pot easier to face than Martin.

"Here," he said.

She turned.

He tapped a pocket.

"I came back and fetched it."

"Oh," she said.

"Audrey?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you ever going to look at me again?"

He drew her closer as he spoke.

"You're like a little flower—I'm afraid of crushing you. And you're afraid, too. You are, dear. But you won't be, soon, will you?"

She tilted back her head and looked at him at last: her eyes were soft and misty, and so beautiful that he caught his breath as he looked into them.

"Please don't be—disappointed," she said, shakily.

"You see, I—I'm not—used to it—"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Oh, you darling! No, I won't be disappointed. Disappointed, when you've told me that you love me! Dear—"

Footsteps drew near; he stopped abruptly; the air seemed to quiver passionately with the words he had been going to say.

"Oh, Miss Fielding," the dark man with the clever face approached for his second dance; the cleverness was marred now as he looked at Martin with what was very much like a scowl, "our waltz is nearly finished," he said, coldly.

And then Audrey astonished Martin. No remorse, no slightest suspicion of compunction showed she.

"Oh, is it?" she said, airily. "Shall we dance the remnant?"

He did not know that all the world and the people in it were unreal and of no account to her just now, always excepting himself. That to him also, in the glorious selfishness of love, no one counted except Audrey, beyond the fact that he went so far as to find every one else mildly irritating, in no wise taught him to understand her mood. His love was too big for him to be able yet to realize how deeply she cared.

"Good-bye, Mr. Jocelyn."

A demure little voice, a demure hand extended through the open door of the motor brougham.

"It has been a most delightful dance. Mr. Barrington, tell Mrs. Barrington from me that no one else has such successes as she has!" Mrs. Letheridge's high voice rang out unabashed by the great, gray stillness of the waking earth.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Good-bye, Mr. Forsyth. Don't be silly! three dances were more than you deserve." Millicent Letheridge's voice was also high.

The brougham was throbbing to be gone; its lamps looked garish in the wet pearly light; they made the puddles glitter with a queerly unreal gleam.

"The rug is coming out," Martin said, and tucked it in.

"That's the second fib to-night," she told him, in a low voice.

"I'd outfib the Father of Lies himself to get the tiniest bit of you."

"I wish it could begin all over again, and then *perhaps* I'd give you four," cried Millicent.

"Oh, to be young!" laughed her mother.

The gray light was whitening, a fine drizzle of rain began to fall. In the wet east a pale gleam of sunshine shone for a minute across the gray, then disappeared.

"You will get wet. Go in."

"I can't let you go, Audrey—"

"Good-bye! Good-bye!"

The brougham throbbed loudly, he shut the door. She leaned suddenly from the window.

"I wish you were taking me home!"

And then she was gone. He had a last glimpse of her, her face shining pale, almost unearthly in the queer gray light, her hair forming an aureole.

He shivered a little.

"She looked like a saint—an angel."

Then he remembered her smile, her words. He thought, contentedly:

"Angels don't smile like that, or say that sort of thing."

CHAPTER XXVII

BEFORE Audrey reached home she began to think of her mother, and of retribution. But years seemed to stretch between her exit from her home and her return. Susan's anger did not, in anticipation, alarm her. It seemed to her now that nothing in all the world could have power to alarm her, save only Martin's anger. She rested bravely on a wonderful new sense of a mighty power of protection on her side.

"It really is a pity that her mother is so impossible, and keeps her shut up so absurdly," Mrs. Letheridge observed, as the brougham started again after dropping Audrey. "She is a charming little thing."

"Yes, very nice. Mother, do you admire that Mrs. Pat? Mr. Forsyth seems to, a good deal."

The door was opened to Audrey by her mother. The light of the dawn, piercing and ruthless in its fresh youth, showed her face gray, lit up every line, drew attention to her strained eyes.

"You've come back," she said.

Audrey was surprised.

"Didn't you think I was ever coming back, Mother?" she said, trying to speak lightly.

"I didn't know," Susan said, in a dull voice.

"Mother, I—I know it was—I know that you think it was wrong of me to go, but—but I had to! I am sorry it had to be like that—" Her halting words ceased.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Do you want anything to eat?" Susan asked.

"No, thank you."

"Then you will go straight to bed?"

"Yes. Mother, why did you sit up? I'm so sorry you did. You must be tired to death."

Then Susan said something that shook Audrey back roughly into the every-day world.

"Yes, I think I am—tired to death."

She said it in the same dull voice. Audrey had never, in all her life, heard her mother own to tiredness.

"Mother, dear! Oh, I'm so sorry." Tears were in her eyes. "Mother, did my going hurt you so much?"

Susan stared at her curiously.

"I don't think I was surprised," she said.

"Then—you will forgive me now?"

"Yes."

Audrey kissed her timidly.

As she turned to go up-stairs, Susan said:

"Where did you get those shoes, Audrey?"

"Oh, they are Mrs. Pat's! I forgot to change them. I lost one of mine on my way there."

She had a sense of a curious stillness behind her; she turned to find her mother still standing at the foot of the stairs.

"Aren't you coming up to bed, Mother?"

Susan began to ascend the staircase.

"Poor Mother, how tired you are! Don't you wonder why it was Mrs. Pat who lent me the shoes?"

"No."

"You would if you weren't so tired, Mother. It was because her's were the only shoes which would fit me. Isn't it curious! Our feet are exactly the same size. And

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

she was so kind and nice about it. She lent me stockings, too. Every one was so kind."

She was talking because her mother's silence had such a curious intenseness about it. But now she ceased.

At the door of her room she paused.

"Good-night, Mother, and—and thank you for being so good about my disobedience."

"It wasn't your fault," Susan said, curtly.

Audrey blushed hotly. Could her mother know?

She went into her room, and mechanically began to undress. But the clock down in the hall, striking eight, found her still dreamily brushing her hair and looking out at the hills. She started when she heard the hour striking, and jumped up with guilty haste. She had promised Martin to go straight to bed. He had said:

"You are to go straight to bed when you get home. You were tired out earlier this evening."

How nice he had looked when he said it. And as if he meant to be obeyed. What a wonderful world it was. To think that she—she, the little girl who laughed in church—was loved by Prince Charming! What a world!

Never had she dreamed that so much happiness could be held in all the whole earth, and now it was held by her—by her and Martin. . . .

She leaned again from the window, turning up her face to catch the pattering raindrops.

"Dear old sulky hills, you're jealous! jealous! jealous! You're all gray and dull and misty, because all the joy and the sunshine of the whole world is mine. No one can take it from me. And oh, dear old hills, I'm going to make

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Martin's life like that, too—oh, so happy! I will try and try. . . . He loves me! . . .”

“You are up already, Audrey?” Susan looked at her from the doorway.

Audrey turned and stood, hot and abashed, at a loss.

“I haven't been to bed yet,” she said, in a small voice.

“It's five minutes to nine. How long will you be before you come down to breakfast?”

No word of surprise, no word of reprimand. The unusualness of it made Audrey feel more abashed than ever. Yet she struggled to say something with a determination that would not be balked by timidity or shyness.

Martin had told her she was to go to bed. She gloried in obeying him, although she had never felt more acutely awake in all her life.

“I—I would like to go to bed now, Mother, please.”

She might glory in her obedience, but she carried it into effect like a naughty child, red-cheeked, head hanging low.

“Now?” Susan repeated. “Very well.”

She left the room, but reappeared the next minute to ask if Audrey would like breakfast first. When she had gone Audrey paused a moment from wonder of her own happiness.

“I believe mother has guessed. Yet how *could* she, when I didn't dream yesterday? . . . But she looks so tired and sad, and that would be because, at first, she would not like the idea of my—caring—and some day—going away. . . .”

Undressing was suspended awhile; then she hurried and sprang into bed.

“Oh, I'm so happy!” In an ecstasy of joy she hugged the pillow. “So happy! So happy! And I'll never go to sleep, never! But Martin said I must . . .”

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Half an hour later the sun, breaking through the misty gray clouds, shone palely in on her, lying fast asleep. There was an exquisite peace and happiness in her face, but she looked pale, as if she had been through many deep emotions.

Susan, entering softly, read her face with hungry eyes. She thought she understood. To her it seemed that now she was confronted with the culmination of all the anxious years of doubt through which she had lived and fought. She had fought strenuously, but her weapons were of no use now in face of the happiness that had come to Audrey through her meeting with that other woman. That happiness paralyzed her; it seemed to do away, ruthlessly and relentlessly, with all the time-worn aphorisms with which she had fed her heart and her conscience for twenty years. And yet, as she stood and looked upon Audrey, the old fierce sense of motherhood surged upon her. Her breath came hard; she clinched her hands with a spasm of new courage; battle shone in her eyes. "She is mine! Oh, God, I *know* she is mine! I must keep her. God, help me to keep her."

As she went softly from the room the old story of Solomon's wisdom was in her ears. . . .

"And the other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. . . ."

"She is mine! That other does not want her. She would know if—but she is mine—"

She had come back two hours later; she stood beside the bed, a little white satin shoe in her hand.

"She *is* mine! If I could *know*—only *know*—the truth—"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Suddenly some words she had read years ago flashed into her mind, and applied themselves poignantly:

*"... uncertain ways unsafest are,
And Doubt a greater Mischief than Despair."*

She did not remember any more; she did not remember their context. They stood out now piercingly clear—they had been written for her. She saw the book in which she had come across them—a little old book bound in faded brown calf. She smelled the faint mustiness of the yellowed pages. She remembered the long s's that had worried her. . . . It was before Audrey had been born. . . . She had gone into her husband's library secretly, like a guilty thing, and had taken books from the shelves. She had read them, labored through them in secret, striving patiently to educate herself—to make herself a little worthy of the child who was coming. . . . After, she had given it up. The doubt that had poisoned her life had absorbed insidiously the mental energy necessary for the effort at self-culture. And now all she remembered of those strenuous readings were those words:

*"... uncertain ways unsafest are,
And Doubt a greater Mischief than Despair."*

She crushed the shoe in her hand; her heart throbbed with passionate acquiescence—"Doubt a greater Mischief than Despair." It was true. . . . A greater Mischief. . . . She looked down at the shoe she held, and her face worked. She pushed out her foot, and studied it grimly. Then she flung the shoe away; she drew herself erect. "The Fielding women have small feet, too." She had begun to fight again.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SHE saw him coming towards her, and childishly, inexcusably, she turned and ran away. In among the pine-trees she stopped, and hot shame brought the tears to her eyes. Why had she done it? He must have seen her. . . .

Oh, how rude and foolish and hateful she was! She had not dreamed she was going to do it, and here it was—done! She had felt, suddenly, on seeing him, that she could not—could not—meet him just then. That was all. Now, what would he do? Would he go away, and never speak to her again? Her heart was almost bursting with fear and shyness and compunction. Or would he come, and look at her angrily, coldly, as he had done last night? She trembled as she waited.

Then she heard his footfall among the bracken; he was coming. He came, walking slowly. He smiled as he drew near, but her heart sank and sank. . . .

“Do you feel all right after last night?” he asked, quietly. He took her hand as he spoke, then dropped it.

She could not answer. She was bewildered, she did not understand. There was a stillness about his face not usual to it; he looked grave and kind, and rather tired.

“Didn’t you sleep well?” she asked, timidly.

He smiled.

“I didn’t want to give up my thoughts,” he said. “I

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

haven't been to bed. Sit here, will you? Is that comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you."

It was the felled trunk of an old beech-tree sawn in half, and left there so long that the moss had crept over it.

He sat down beside her. There was a queer silence between them. She glanced at him nervously; he had taken off his panama hat, and was twisting and squeezing it in his hands. She recognized the habit as an old one—nine years ago he used to do that. . . .

She broke the silence:

"Are—are you cross?"

He turned his head and looked down at her very tenderly.

"What a baby you are," he said, gently. "No, I'm not cross. What made you think that?"

"You—you are different, and—and I am sorry I—ran away. I didn't mean to—"

"Why did you do it, Audrey?"

"I don't quite know. It was when I saw you coming, I—I felt I couldn't—meet you—and I ran away, before I could stop myself—"

He summed it up, inexorably:

"You were frightened of me again."

"No, I'm not! I don't know why it was. Is that why you are different—Martin?"

The shy little "Martin" made him smile down at her; then his face grew grave again.

"I'm disappointed," he said, as gently as before. "And I've got to be very careful, and hold myself well in hand. I'm not going to be a brute and take by force what you

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

don't want to give. That's why," he finished, simply, "I only shook hands."

She sat and thought about it, in a whirl of conflicting feelings.

"I want to pick that buttercup," she said, presently. "You stay there."

She picked it, then stood hesitating, rubbing it up and down against her cheek. Martin was watching her.

"Look at that greenfinch," she said, in a funny little way, "please look at him, Martin."

He looked obediently.

The color was coming and going in her cheeks, her lips were very serious, but her eyes were soft. She crept up behind him where he sat on the tree-trunk; two gentle arms went round his neck. "I'm not frightened," came a little whisper. And then a soft little kiss, so light and shy that it was a memory almost before it was given, fell upon the top of his head.

He had been talking about his home. She watched his face kindle as he spoke of it.

"You love your home very much," she said, her mind back in the old time when even then, as a child, she had seen how dear his home was to him.

"Yes, every stick and stone," he said, simply. "And so will you, very soon."

"It's so big, Martin."

"But so cosey, sweetheart. I can see you there. You've got to love it, Audrey."

"Martin?"

"Yes."

"I'm very ignorant, and not used to—to people, and all

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

that sort of thing. I don't think you realize what a very quiet life I have led."

He drew her closer.

"Yes, I do, you poor little soul. Oh, Audrey, you'll make the dearest little chatelaine!"

"But one has to know about things—all sorts of things," she said, with strong self-distrust.

"Marcia will help you, dear."

Her face brightened.

"So she will!"

"And the governor will adore you. He's such a dear old man, Audrey, you're sure to love him."

"Is he like you?"

"Very much, people say, only his hair is white, you know, and his temper isn't half so good! You'll have to help me in some alterations I want to make about the place. And there's a row of cottages. People come quite a long way to see them, they're so picturesque, but they'll have to come down—"

"Oh, and will you put horrid little new red houses instead?"

He laughed.

"No; you shall help me to make the new ones quite plain and decent. My father has been talking lately of handing all that sort of thing over to me, and there's a lot I want to do. I've no end of plans. Barker's a decent sort, but he hasn't much in the way of brains; he wants looking after. That sort of thing won't bore you, will it, Audrey?"

"Nothing that interests you will bore me," she said, earnestly. "Don't, Martin! I'm serious— You will lend me books all about drains, and building cottages, and

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

about landlords and tenants, won't you? And I'll study them—"

"Oh, you darling! I can't help it; you shouldn't look at me like that. You and drains! No, I'll teach you all you need know. Remember how I used to teach you years ago?"

"Yes; and you upset my decorous mind by declaring that immaculate people were always good, and therefore horrid."

"—who can tell the mischief which the very virtuous do?" he quoted, lazily. "Take you for an awful example. You are very virtuous, and look at the mischief you do! That poor beggar of a Townshend came down to breakfast this morning as glum as if he'd got the toothache! And for some unaccountable reason he seems to want to bite my head off. A personage like him, too! Why, he's the stop-gap of quite a lot of the papers. When they've a bit that must be filled, and nothing to fill it with, they use him, and how many blots he makes on every sheet of paper, or how many times he frowns during one of his speeches, and you—the virtuous you—have given him mental toothache!"

"I haven't, and you know that isn't what Thackeray meant. And you are very foolish, Martin."

"M—Martin. You may call me what names you like, so long as you tack that dear little M—Martin on at the end. Audrey, you're very tiresome. In books it never happens—the hero's ring, the one he wears on his little finger, always fits the heroine. Now look! It would take in all your fingers. I'm coming home with you now to see your mother; then I'm going to tell Marcia; then I'm going home to tell my father, and I shall bring a ring of

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

my mother's back for you. I know he'll want me to. She used always to wear it. I can remember it when I was a little chap. Her hands were like yours, I think—little soft thin hands. . . . It's pearls—pearls suit you—and it's very quaint. You'll like it, won't you?"

"I shall love it."

"And then afterwards I'll buy you others—grander ones. And I'll take you to town, and show you all the sights."

"Theatres and concerts and picture-galleries?"

"Yes, tons of 'em!"

"Oh, Martin!"

"Oh, Audrey!"

"Martin?"

"Yes, sweet."

"I want to ask you something. Don't look at me."

"My eyes won't turn away. You must shut them for me."

She pressed his lids down gently.

When she took her hands away, he looked at her again.

"You must do it once more," he coaxed.

"Promise you will keep them shut, then."

"Very well."

There was a pause.

"It isn't fair," he ejaculated, "to shut me out from Paradise for such ages."

"I want to ask you something very important, only I—only—"

"Ask me, dear," he said, in a different tone.

"I want to know—oh, Martin, when did you first—first begin to—to like me?"

CHAPTER XXIX

AUDREY had elected to tell her mother herself. For hours she had been striving to gain sufficient courage to do so. Now the long shadows of evening had merged into the one great dusky shadow of early night, and still she had not told. It was such a beautiful thing; it was so hard to put it into words. And she shrank from any discussion. . . .

The little young moon looked down at her as she walked up and down the garden; the stars looked down, too. . . . Oh, what a beautiful, beautiful world it was! The moon and the stars seemed so near; once they had been aloof, wonderful, coldly lovely, but now they were near—all beautiful things seemed near now—and kind. . . .

She went into the house.

"Amelia, where is mother?"

"Up in her room."

Amelia's tone was cross. Audrey paused.

"Are you tired?" she asked, gently.

"I'm always tired now," Amelia said, despondently.

"Let me put those plates away for you."

Amelia stood and watched her.

"My fingers are all thumbs, too, lately," she said. "If it wasn't for the stray cats who get into the kitchen, Susan 'ud be always at me for the things I break."

Audrey winced; she did not seek elucidation upon

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Amelia's somewhat vague speech; she preferred not to have her petty deceits put into plain words.

"You haven't told me a word about the ball or anything," Amelia grumbled. "Every one's getting too high and mighty for poor and humble friends nowadays."

"I told you all I could remember," Audrey said, patiently. Lately Amelia had developed a habit of whining at fortune which was very trying to the nerves; she had grown suspicious and unjust, too, and was showing herself in her most unattractive aspect.

"You think I don't know what's going on," she resumed. "Oh, you needn't blush like that! I'm sure it's only natural; but you might confide in poor old Amelia, who'd sympathize, though Susan is my cousin, and her no relation at all. I do believe there's more up than we know about, for all you look so innocent and speak so soft. They do say a mother's heart can never be deceived, and for all her wickedness she's a mother, so p'r'aps it's from her it's come. I'm sure I don't know how far it's true about a mother's heart, never having been one myself, through man's perfidy, and so constant I never could think of another—" Amelia dissolved into tears.

Audrey, who had grown into the way of dreaming lately, woke at sight of her tears, and came across to her.

"Sit down, and I will make you a cup of tea," she said, knowing that tea was Amelia's unfailing panacea for all ills.

Amelia wiped her eyes, but refused the tea.

"Tea cannot heal a wounded heart," she said.

"Amelia, don't talk as if we are unkind to you."

"Tisn't you, dearie, but there's some who are that hard they never can understand the weakness of a sensitive nature, though living a lie day by day themselves. I get

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

thinking of old times lately a lot, somehow, and it makes me miserable. I think I will have a cup of tea, after all, but I'll make it myself. I know just how long I like it to stand and how much tea to put in. Tea's wonderfully sustaining, when all's said and done."

Audrey left her and went up to her mother's room. Susan was standing looking out of the window. Her face, as she turned it to Audrey on her entrance, was black against the moonlit night.

"Mother," Audrey said, "I have something to tell you."

Susan was silent. Audrey searched her face in vain; it was too dark for her to see any expression.

"It's very difficult to—tell," she faltered, childishly.

"Then get it over quickly." Susan's voice was harsh.

"Mr. Jocelyn loves me," Audrey said, in a curiously prim little voice, "and I love him."

"Is that all?" Susan said.

"All?"

In Audrey's dazed echo of the word there was a revelation. Susan moved suddenly forward, closer to her.

"Is that why you have looked so happy? Is that why you disobeyed me, and went to the ball? Was it of him you were thinking all the while? Was it? Tell me, child! Tell me, quickly!" She had laid hold of Audrey's arm; her fingers gripped so tightly that they hurt her flesh.

"Yes, Mother," Audrey said.

That was all, but the moonlight shone on her face, and Susan read it aright. She made a queer little noise in her throat, and suddenly put her arms about the slim figure, and held her close.

"Oh, Mother, you're—not angry? You are glad?"

"Yes, dear, I am very glad," Susan said.

CHAPTER XXX

UP in her room Audrey sat and read.

It was afternoon and the room was very hot. The breeze that came in playful bursts from the south did not reach her window. Audrey's brows were drawn into a faint frown of utter seriousness, her lips were closely shut.

"After the gutter has been laid to fit the chimney, a lead 'flashing,' about eleven inches broad or so, has to be put up each side of the chimney; its length—taking the chimney at two feet thick—will be about two feet ten inches, or more, according to the pitch of the roof."

She looked up from the little faded book, keeping her finger on the page she had been reading.

"After the gutter has been laid . . ."

Was Martin with his father now? What would he say? How would he ever understand Martin's wanting her—her—since she could never understand it herself? . . . Only the tops of the hills were in the sunlight now—dear old hills! It was beautiful to talk, silently, to the hills—to talk of Martin—Martin—Martin. The birds sang of him, too. The bees buzzed of him. Dear, old, warm, beautiful world. . . . Oh, what a frivolous mind she had! She would never, never be a fit wife for Martin. . . .

"It bends round the chimney a little at the bottom, and at the top goes up to the back of the chimney-gutter,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

whatever portion of the lead flashing projects above the sole, or bottom of the gutter, being cut away."

Down in the road children's voices laughed; a cart rumbled by; a blue butterfly flew past the window, close to the studious head bent so inexorably over the faded book.

Audrey sat and read.

She heard all the sounds—the sounds that held a subtle charm, that called to her to put away the dry old book and come out. She saw the gay little butterfly, and impulsively threw after it a kiss. "Take it to Martin," she whispered, and, blushing, returned to her reading.

"This chimney-flashing is put into a chasing, as described for chimney-flashings in chapter iv. After the flashings are on, a lead gutter has to be laid along the back of the chimney. The lead for gutters so situated may be of various breadths, according to the pitch of the roof, and the way in which the carpenter has been directed to lay the wood."

The hot afternoon wore on. Laboriously she tried to concentrate her mind on gutters and chimneys. She would not take her book out to read, for fear of distraction. She was very much in earnest, very serious. She had found the book in an old box up in an attic; she had gone there to look for some book that would be able to teach her something about building cottages. She did so want to understand when Martin should talk to her about the building of new cottages for his tenants. She was so ignorant!

With head bent low she sat and read.

A delicate whiff came in at the window, elusive, laden with dreams. . . . One day Martin had picked her a great bunch of honeysuckle. He had refused to let her pick it

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

for herself. He had said, "You sha'n't tear those poor little hands." And she had been glad to let him gather it; yet always, before then, the gathering had been half the joy. . . . There was honeysuckle now, down in the hedge that bordered the road: if she were to lean out she would see it—she would see that tall piece, all pink and cream, that waved triumphantly above the reach of passers-by. But Martin would be able to reach it, Martin was so tall. One day he had helped her over those difficult stepping-stones down by Farney Wood. She was such a coward; but when he held her hand she was not afraid. He had said: "I'd like to pick you up and carry you across." Well, now—perhaps—another time. . . .

"After the gutter has been laid to fit the chimney . . ."

She did not know even that yet! How slow she was! Why couldn't she keep her mind upon the subject of chimneys and gutters? Long ago Martin had helped her with her lessons. Perhaps he would help her with this, and then she would understand all about flashings and chasings and gutters and things. But she must try to learn more of it by herself—she *must* do something to begin to fit herself to be his wife.

"After the gutter has been laid to fit the chimney—the chimney, chimney, chimney . . ." Oh, what a glorious world it was! Sooty old chimneys!

Was the sunshine as happy as she was? Could it be? Why hadn't Martin loved one of the beautiful, accomplished girls he must have been always meeting? Suppose his father refused to welcome her? But Martin had been so sure. Only—only—sometimes it seemed *almost* impossible that she could go on being quite so happy. She and Martin! . . . Dear little pinky-creamy honey-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

suckle! there it was, waving to her gently. She would not let Martin pick it when he came back. She loved honeysuckle. She loved everything! Everything was beautiful! . . .

The clock in the hall down-stairs struck four wheezy notes. Guiltily she turned from the window, hastily she picked up her book. All in a conscience-stricken whirl of flurry.

“After the gutter has been laid to fit the chimney, a lead ‘flashing’ about eleven inches broad or so, has to be put up each side—” Audrey read.

CHAPTER XXXI

HILARY JOCELYN sat looking out on the little garden that had been so beloved by his wife. Here there grew, in their season, all the sweet old-fashioned flowers she had loved so dearly. It was sheltered here, and this one spot seemed always to him to gather more sweetness than all the rest of the gardens. He sat near the old fountain that she had loved, and frowned in thought. He was a fine old man; the upper part of his face was wide and kindly, but his somewhat heavy chin and thin mouth denoted more than strength of will; they spoke of obstinacy. His blue eyes now were steely; they looked much as Martin's had on that night of the ball, when he had frightened Audrey with his cold anger. In his right hand he held a letter, and it was scrawled in the bad handwriting of Professor Forbes. His gaze rested on a great bed of clove carnations, but he did not see them; his thoughts were back in the past, and, as he stared before him, the expression of his face altered, the anger was softened by a great sadness. His wife had been dead for nearly twenty-one years, but there were times still when he missed her as sharply as he had done in those first months of terrible grief.

Presently he rose, and entered by a long window the room that had been hers from the moment she came to his house, so shy and young, and had exclaimed with

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

pleasure at the pretty, long room opening onto the little shut-in patch of garden. She had been fond of sweet scents; she had filled jars and bowls with pot-pourri and lavender, and their faint sweet perfumes clung about the room still. She had loved delicate, pretty colors, and the room was furnished in faint pinks and blues and white, faded now, and wearing an air of pathetic beauty.

The water-color paintings on the wall harmonized with the rest of the room; there was nothing sad, nothing gloomy, nothing grand; they were all little sunny bits of landscape, of gardens, and a few were portraits of pretty children. The room was very typical; it breathed very sweetly of the little dead girl-wife who had been so happy there.

When Martin reached the house and heard that his father was in there, he was glad. He felt that he could speak of Audrey better there than anywhere else—that his father would receive his news with more sympathy there. His childhood's memories were strongly associated with that room. He could remember a convalescence spent on the blue and pink sofa, with a dainty figure in white sitting beside him, reading aloud from a book. It was a red book with gold letters on it, but he could not remember what it had been about. Afterwards the figure in white had lain on the sofa while he had played about the room—hushed games, so that his mother should not be disturbed. Then had come a time when he would peep through the windows at the blue and pink sofa, with a dreadful unmanly longing to cry, and each time would go through a fresh disappointment because the sofa was empty. Yet he must have known it would be empty; they had told him that his mother had been taken away to heaven. For many nights

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

and mornings he had refused stubbornly to say his prayers, and had shocked his nurse by his opinion, curtly given, that it was pretty mean of God to take his mother when he had plenty of angels up there already.

Since then he had often sat in the room with his father. It was there that he had heard the stories of his mother's goodness, her beauty, her sweetness; there that his father's gravest, deepest talks to him in his boyhood had taken place. So now he entered quietly.

His father was standing by the mantel-shelf; he turned as Martin came in. He was a very outspoken, direct sort of man. He said, without any greeting:

"Is it true that you have been carrying on a flirtation with a daughter of John Fielding's?"

Martin's face paled a little; he held his head high as he answered:

"No. But I love her, and I have asked her to be my wife, and she has said she will."

There was a pause. Martin broke it in a different tone.

"Dad, who has been interfering? I've come to tell you—"

"When it's all settled."

"I've come at once. It was only the night before last—"

"It doesn't matter when it was. You can't marry her."

Martin had never heard this tone from his father. Angry, blustering, impatient tones he would have understood, but this new voice, hard and cold, puzzled him.

"Will you tell me what you mean, Father?"

"I mean that I will never give my consent to your marrying a daughter of John Fielding's. The man was a cad and a scoundrel. The blood is bad. He spoiled the last

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

year of your mother's life. I believe he killed her. I'm not saying it heedlessly. As God hears me, I believe John Fielding to have killed my wife. For twenty-one years I have believed it, and I will never have a daughter of his in this house."

Martin's face was white now, but he was very quiet.

"What did he do?" he said, in a low voice.

"We met him in a country-house. He had just married badly, and had come to say good-bye to his friends before going to America. He had loved your mother. He was vindictive, spiteful—always was, as a boy. He dragged out an old story—it was ten years old—nothing bad, but not creditable to me. I had been a young fool—got into the clutches of an adventuress—I needn't go into that. He told your mother. Afterwards he wrote to me—a canting, lying letter—from America; he said he hadn't meant to tell her. That doesn't matter. He told her, and he dated the story five years too late."

"Good God!"

"Two years after I had married her."

Martin nodded.

"She didn't believe him." For a moment his voice shook; he walked the length of the room, then came back to the mantel-shelf. "She came to me, and asked me if it were true. She laughed. I told her it was. It killed her."

"She didn't mention the time?"

"No. At the last, the day before she died, it came out."

There was a long silence.

"You—never guessed?"

"No. I thought that she was hard on me, although she was always gentle, but I didn't understand women. She was so pure, so delicate—" He stopped, abruptly.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Martin was silent, his mind working over the bitter tragedy that a word could have averted.

"Now you know why I will never have a daughter of his in this house. He was drowned a few months later, otherwise I should have killed him."

Martin said:

"Yes," and was silent awhile. He added: "His daughter—" But Hilary politely interrupted.

"There is nothing to say. No praises of her will move me. On the day you marry her, I disinherit you. I shall make a new will, leaving all this to your cousin, Harry Jocelyn."

"It isn't fair, Dad! When you are calmer you must see it! You have always been fair. You pride yourself on it. God knows I sympathize with you. But Audrey is as good and pure as my mother was. I tell you I love her with all my heart and soul. And she loves me—"

"You don't know what love is! A boy-and-girl affair. If you knew, you would know too that it's of no use appealing to me. I was a man of thirty-five when I married your mother. You're just a boy—"

"I'm not. And, if you persist, it means that we'll never see each other again—you and I. I shall work for her; I won't give her up, and she won't give me up."

"And your home?"

A spasm crossed his face, he set his teeth hard for a moment.

"She is worth even that."

Hilary Jocelyn stood a minute in silence; his eyes fell on a picture of his wife, painted in the first years of her marriage. The pretty, girlish face looked out from the canvas, with wide, joyous eyes; her mouth was smiling;

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

there was a dimple in her pink cheek. Suddenly, with a vividness that blinded him to all else, he saw her face as it had grown to look in that last year: he saw the pallor, the thin cheek, the tired eyes. . . . He turned suddenly to the little table beside him, he groped as if he could not see, till his hand fell upon the ivory-and-gold Bible that she had read from every day.

As he picked it up, a few dried rose leaves fluttered to the floor. His hand shook, but his voice rang out, strong and firm:

“I swear, before God, here, on her Bible, that on the day you wed a daughter of John Fielding’s, you cease to be my son, and all this property shall go to your cousin, Harry Jocelyn.”

CHAPTER XXXII

SHE met Martin as he was on his way to the gray cottage. She saw a difference in him at once; it seemed to her that in some indefinable way he had aged. But her heart sang because he had come back, and because she could read his welcome in his face.

"You have been travelling too much," she said, with her delightful little assumption of motherliness, "you are tired."

He smiled.

"I'm tired out with longing for you."

"Oh!"

"Audrey, you didn't run away this time when you saw me."

"The future mistress of 'Hurstonleigh' is obliged to be more dignified," she rejoined, demurely.

He did not answer, and she glanced up into his face.

"Martin, what is it? Ah, I know! Your father does not think I am good enough for you. Is that it?"

"No. Not in the way you mean. Come in here, I want to tell you something."

She followed him through the clinging brambles, till they reached the side of the stream where they had sat before now.

"Sit down," he said.

She did not seem to hear him; her whole figure, as she stood waiting, expressed suspense.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Tell me quickly," she said.

He looked down into her face hungrily.

"Tell me first that you love me, Audrey! Say it again. Say it now."

"You know I do, Martin."

"But I want to hear you say it! I want to know how much you love me. Tell me that."

"I can't! How could I? My love is me—myself—oh, Martin, I am frightened!"

His face altered.

"I'm a selfish brute," he said, passing his hand across his forehead. "I know you love me. But I have bad news for you—very bad news. Audrey, I know you won't fail me. Dear, when I went to my father that old fool of a Professor had already written to him, telling him his suspicions about you and me. It was a bad beginning; not that it matters, I think. My father—it's difficult to tell you—your father did something—he and my father quarrelled badly. . . . Audrey, he has refused to receive you, he has sworn that on the day I marry you he disinherits me!"

There was a long silence. She stared down at the stream, which was still laughing and gurgling over the happiness in the world—it was still flecked with warm little patches of sunlight; overhead, in the trees, birds rustled and hopped and sang. Only she was dead. She felt vaguely that now she knew what it was like to die. She was very cold.

Somehow she understood at once the irrevocability of the vow Martin's father had sworn; no thought of his relenting crossed her mind. She was sorry for Martin, too, only, somehow, she felt so numb and dull. . . .

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I am very cold," she said, in a quiet little voice.

His arms were round her at once, his eager voice in her ear.

"Darling, don't look like that! After all, we shall be very happy. It's a lot to ask you to do—to take a chap who has his way to make in the world, but you'll do it, won't you?"

"I don't know what you mean," she said, in the same expressionless voice.

"Why, don't you understand? Hurstonleigh will go to my cousin Harry. But I have two hundred a year from my mother. We could live on that just for a little while, till I can give you more. Could you do it for me, Audrey? Could you live a hard life, a poor life, for me? Do you think I'm worth it?"

"Yes," she said.

His arms tightened about her.

"My darling! My brave darling! I knew you would! Oh, Audrey, I will work for you! I'm not worth what you're giving me, but at least I'll try to be! Nothing will be too hard for me when we are married—"

"But we are not going to be married, Martin."

His arms slackened.

"What do you mean?"

She began to tremble; she put up her hand to her head.

"I—I feel so muddled. Don't be angry, Martin. I'm very foolish, I know—"

"Foolish! Angry! Dear, you must be muddled to think such awful things. You're just the little Audrey of years ago. Tell me what you don't understand, and I will try to explain."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"You said that if you marry me you lose your home forever."

"Yes."

"It is quite certain?"

"Yes."

"What did my father do?"

"He—well, he told my mother something about my father, and, perhaps accidentally, gave the wrong date; at any rate, she understood that the thing he told her had happened after they were married. Do you see, dear? It was nothing bad, but it had to do with another woman—a bad sort of woman. And when she asked my father if it were true, he said it was. She mentioned no date, you see. Just before she died the truth came out. My father thinks the—the mistake killed her."

"If my father did that, he is quite right to refuse to let you marry me."

He looked at her surprised. Her face was stern.

"He must have been a wicked man," she said.

It seemed unnatural to him that she should speak like that of her dead father. This was a new Audrey to him. She seemed to feel his thoughts.

"It is terrible to have to speak so of one's father, but it is true," she said, inexorably.

"He may not have been so bad as he seems," he tried to comfort her. "My father said that he wrote that he had not meant to tell her—"

Her thoughts had gone off on a new tack.

"They loved each other as much as we do."

"Audrey, when will you marry me?"

She drew back with a shiver; her face was dead white; she faced him with wide, terrified eyes.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Never," she breathed.

"You said that before! What do you mean? You said you could live a poor life—that you thought I was worth it—"

"That has nothing to do with it. You know it hasn't. It's—your home—I won't marry you—and take that from you—"

She looked so young and frightened, standing there; he was confident of overruling her. But gradually he realized that beneath her softness, her obvious fear, there was a groundwork so solid, so unyielding, that the horrible possibility of failure began to dangle before his eyes. He would not, could not, believe it. His passionate words poured out: he told her of his plans, of the friend in British Columbia who was making a fortune on his ranch, and whom he thought of joining. He begged, he ordered, pleaded, stormed—and she stood there, with her white face and frightened eyes, immovable. At last he came to an end, and there was silence between them.

"You still refuse?"

"Yes."

"It amounts to this, then"—his voice now was cold and quiet: "that you can love me when I have Hurstonleigh as a picturesque background, but with a beggarly two hundred and my way to make in the world, I am incapable of inspiring your affection."

"You look just as you did in the conservatory," she said, in a curious, detached little way.

He stared down at her.

"So, after all, you're like most modern women: you find it easy enough to care for a man with plenty of money, but devilish hard to care for a poor beggar like me!"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She did not look angry. She said, wearily:

"You know it isn't true."

"Audrey! Yes, I do know. Forgive me, darling. Look at me! Now listen—"

She made a sudden quick movement away from him, putting out her hands in a piteous gesture.

"Oh, no, no! Not again! I think I shall go mad if you say it all again!"

"But I must. You don't think we can part like this?"

"I want to think." She put her hands up before her eyes. "Martin, my head feels so funny. I—I don't think I can bear any more—please—"

"Very well, dear. I ought to have thought that it's been too much for you. Sit here. I won't say a word."

She sat down obediently, and tried to think. He leaned against the trunk of a tree and watched her anxiously.

She found herself watching the gnats that buzzed above the stream; then her eyes followed a bee as it hovered over a tall pink fox-glove. She tried to think, but in her brain, over and over again, drummed foolishly:

*"How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower."*

"Audrey, you feel better now?"

"Yes, thank you."

*"And gather honey all the day
And gather honey all the day
How doth the little busy bee . . ."*

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I am trying to think," she said, piteously. The bee had flown away, but still the words drummed maddeningly in her brain:

*"How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour . . ."*

She could not think. She felt as if all of her were dead except one mad corner of her mind, that held only those foolish words.

*"From every opening flower
From every opening flower
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower."*

"Martin, I can't think. I would like to go home."
He took her home; he was very gentle, very tender.
She promised she would lie down.
But they were still drumming—drumming . . .

"How doth the little busy bee . . ."

CHAPTER XXXIII

“PERHAPS you could make her alter her mind.”

Marcia looked at him pitifully.

“I have seen her,” she said, gently.

He stopped in his walk up and down the room.

“Well?”

“She will never change her mind, Martin.”

He went on walking up and down the room.

“I’ve never known her at all, after all! I thought she was such a gentle little thing—”

“So she is.”

“She’s iron! She looks at me—oh, God, I *must* make her change her mind!”

Presently:

“Aren’t you surprised at her?”

“No; I don’t think I am,” she said, slowly. “I have always known that beneath her softness there is an unusual rigidity where her conscience is concerned—a puritanism, the quality of which martyrs are made. She will never marry you, Martin. It may kill her, but she won’t give in.”

“That’s it. God knows, if I thought she shrank from the life she’d have to live, I’d give her up till I’d made enough to offer her a decent home, but—”

“No; that has nothing to do with it.”

She looked hopelessly out of the window.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Martin came and stood by her chair.

"I can't give her up," he said, quietly.

Marcia's eyes filled with tears.

"Your father—"

"That's no good. He swore. The curious part of the whole thing is that I can't help sympathizing, in a way, with him. If you'd seen his face—after all these years—when he spoke of my mother's death. I should do the same, in his place, I'm afraid, unjust as it is. If a man were to do to Audrey—to come between us when we're married—as her father did, I believe I'd sooner see my son dead than married to a child of his! I know it's all wrong, but there it is!"

"You're wonderfully like your father," she said, thoughtfully.

"If only I had known! I'd have worked it somehow that he met her without knowing who she was. That would have done it. He'd have given in, once he knew her. Now it's too late. But I've got to make her change her mind somehow."

She looked up at him hesitatingly; she seemed to want to say something that yet she scarcely dared. Marcia was not often nervous over what she considered to be her duty. But Martin's face made her hesitate. At last she said it.

"You mean you will see her again? Go over it all again?"

He nodded grimly.

"Martin, I—believe you will make her ill. She—can't stand it—"

His face did not soften.

"It's worth it, I believe, for her, as well as for me."

"But it will do no good."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

He turned on her then.

"Would you have me give in without a struggle? Any one would think it was some paltry matter, without any big issue at stake! It's our lives—her's and mine—that's all! And if my fighting knocks her up now, it's worth it! I tell you, it's worth it, and I shall go on fighting, if need be, till I die."

"Or she does," Marcia said.

"Very well, or till she does."

They were silent for some while then. He marched about the room restlessly, picking up books and putting them down, stooping to pat Euphemia.

"I wish I could help you," Marcia said, at last, sadly.

"You can. You can plead with her. Your opinion has great weight with her."

She looked at him thoughtfully. How little he really understood Audrey! Couldn't he see that if his pleading failed, the pleading of any one else would not even be considered? Or was it only the wilful blindness of desperation? She thought it was the latter—that instinctive building up of a mental wall to keep off despair.

So she said, gently, that she would do her best.

He turned to her abruptly after awhile.

"You know her well. She does care—a lot, doesn't she?"

Marcia's heart ached over him, he looked so young and desperate.

"Yes," she said. "She loves you with all her heart and soul."

"Then oughtn't we to be able to make her see what it will mean to me to live without her?" The words came in an eager rush now. "She knows I love Hurstonleigh.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

To leave it forever—to know that that fool of a Harry is making a mess of everything—would have seemed hell to me a few months ago. I acknowledge it. To give up the old man—” his voice shook a little—“is worse than hell. But I can do both. I can’t give her up! I must make her see it—make her see that she is worth it all. If she cares enough she must see it. If she can’t see it, it means—it must mean—that she doesn’t care enough. Isn’t that right?”

Marcia shook her head.

“I don’t think you could understand, Martin. She cares enough, poor child, but she will never realize that you could care for her so much that you would never repent. She is too modest and too proud and too conscientious to marry you. I wish I could see some way out. Even if she gave in—oh, Martin, think what you would be giving up!”

“I have thought,” he said, curtly.

“Don’t break that paper-knife, please.”

He flung it down with a little laugh.

“I sha’n’t break it. I’m not in a novel. If I were I should be tearing around, moving heaven and earth—however that’s done—to win her! As it is, I shall presently go in and eat a good lunch. Then I shall go and worry her till she looks at me as if I’m some hateful monster she can’t get away from. And all the irresistible arguments that are bound to win her over stick in my throat, and I repeat myself till I feel like that beastly parrot of Morley’s, who never says anything but ‘I love you, my dear,’ all day long!”

“You didn’t eat a good breakfast,” she said, dryly.

“Because I didn’t have my canter.”

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Why didn't you?"

His forehead reddened a little.

"I was trying to compile a few irresistible arguments. I wish I was one of those writing chaps who can reel off a dozen romantic speeches at a moment's notice. But I'm going to win this afternoon. You wait and see. Wish I knew which side that queer little mother of her's is on. She just keeps silent."

"She won't be on yours."

"Well, I suppose I'm not much of a catch now!"

"Think a minute, Martin. Could you expect her, under the circumstances, to wish her daughter to marry you?"

"No, I suppose not. Well, I can fight alone. No one's on my side. Dick isn't. You're not, really."

A faint flush rose to her cheeks. She looked distressed.

"I did my best for you," she said, in a low voice.

"Because you're kind, and because you know I won't give in."

"Well, you see, Martin—oh, it breaks my heart to think of your not succeeding to Hurstonleigh, and you know it half breaks yours! I feel frightened when I think of you two starting your life together with such a tremendous sacrifice. It seems to me that there would always be a shadow over everything. Your love would have to be almost divine to keep that shadow away. And it would break your father's heart, too, to lose you, and to know that Harry would reign there when he was gone! He has done it all; but I love him, and I pity him—all alone, there, waiting. . . . And your children, Martin. Could you help, if you had a son, whenever you looked at him, thinking of what you had taken away from him? Oh,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Martin, it is a terrible tangle, and I see no way out of it!"

He had listened grimly, his face set.

"There is only one way out of it," he said, curtly, "and I've got to make her see it, too, that's all."

He turned and left the room.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHEN Audrey had told Susan of Martin's love for her, Susan had been glad. Her natural jealousy had been unable, for the moment, to assert itself; it lay buried beneath the peace and relief that Audrey's words had brought to her. She realized that all her suspicions had been without foundation, her reasoning altogether wrong. The reaction had come during the night. Her jealousy uprose, and told her relentlessly, cruelly, that she would never again be first in Audrey's life. She suffered a good deal, but it was suffering that, even in the midst of the pain of it, she recognized as natural—a suffering that most mothers have to undergo at some time or other; and so she found it bearable.

But when she understood that the love-story was to be cut off short, that there was to be an end of it, a fierce joy at first possessed her. She would have Audrey all to herself once more. With conscientious care she told Martin that she was quite sure her husband's wrong dating of the story had not been intentional.

"He was a good man; he would not tell a lie," she said, with the impartial fairness of one speaking of an acquaintance.

After that she turned to Audrey.

She told herself that she was a child, that she would soon get over her parting from Martin.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Constitutionally incapable herself of experiencing the depth of a love like Audrey's, she treated it as she would have treated an attack of influenza or any other illness. All the deeps of her own nature had gone to swell the love she bore for her child; she could only dimly understand any other love. But she knew how terribly Audrey was suffering, and the knowledge, hurting badly, was yet softened to her by her conviction that the suffering could not last.

Her natural reserve stayed her from alluding to Martin, and Audrey was grateful. She found now her nearest approach to peace in her mother's company.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE world had grown so unreal—everybody seemed unreal, and everything. It was so difficult to go on talking and smiling to people who were not real. But she had to do it.

Martin had gone.

Once before he had gone—long ago; but then she had known that some day he would come back.

Now he would never come back.

He had said:

“If I go now, I shall never come back. Shall I go?”

And she had said: “Yes.”

It seemed curious to think that she had said “Yes.”

And he had gone. She had watched him go, in and out the trunks of the pine-trees, on to the long, white road, till he had dwindled to a speck and vanished.

And now there was no one real left in the world: she was all alone.

She was very tired. . . .

Perhaps to-night she would sleep so deeply that she would not dream. She had walked all those miles to make herself sleep.

The nights were so cruel. . . . Long ago she had been frightened of the night. . . . She was frightened now.

His face had looked so old and white. Poor Martin! She had had to hurt him—she! For a little while—such

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

a little while—she had dreamed that she was going to help keep all hurt away from him, and now she had made him look old and white. . . . But he would have suffered more afterwards if she had not made him suffer now.

He would have suffered terribly—more and more, as the years went by. He loved his father and his home so dearly. Years ago, when she was a little girl, she had seen how proud he was of his home. He hadn't said much, but she had seen. . . .

He would have been homesick—always. He would have tried to hide it, but she would have known. Always the pain would have been there, the longing for his beautiful home. Oh yes, he would have suffered terribly.

Now he was suffering, too, but some one had told her that men do not go on suffering as women do. They forget. Martin would forget. And she would be glad. Yes, she *would* be glad—soon. She was very selfish. . . .

The sunlight had flickered down through the pines onto his head, his shoulders, as he went away. He had such a fine head, such broad shoulders. . . .

She had never asked him what it was in her that he had first loved. And now he had gone. She wished it were winter, cold, bare winter. She was so tired of the hot sunshine, it made her feel so queer and dizzy.

One day he had told her that although Hurstonleigh was not entailed, it had come down from father to son in one unbroken line, since it was presented by Richard I. to that Martin Henry Jocelyn who had so distinguished himself as a gallant Crusader. He had been proud of that. Yet he had wanted to give it all up for her! It was strange how even that thought now could not make her feel any-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

thing but that sort of ache that never went. She was going to be very brave, but she wished she were not quite so young. If she lived till she were seventy—fifty years more—over twice as long as she had lived already! Fifty years seemed such a long time to ache and ache. . . .

Men were different, so she had been told. She was glad for Martin's sake. She could not bear Martin to have that pain. A long while ago she had felt that if he came again and again to argue and plead, she would go mad; she had felt that she could not bear it. How strange that seemed now! Because while he argued and pleaded, he had been there,—close beside her—and the world was real.

Now she would never see him again, never hear his voice. He had such a nice voice—Martin.

All the time she had known, deep down, that she was too happy. God had thought so too. It seemed to her that He had been rather cruel, but she must not think that; somewhere there was, she supposed, a meaning to it. Only she was too tired now to find it.

She hoped Martin did not feel so tired.

And there was the pain behind her eyes, inside her head; it was such a solid sort of pain. She hoped he didn't have that, either, or the other pains.

But men were different. . . .

Once he had said:

“You're the bravest little soul in the world!”

How queer that seemed. Because really she was such a coward. She was so frightened of the night. . . . Perhaps she would tell him, and he would laugh that dear laugh that never hurt, and then she would not be frightened any more. . . . She was never frightened when he

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

was with her. . . . Nor tired. . . . He had such nice, kind hands. . . . You were always safe and glad with him. . . .

"Martin, I'm so tired. . . ."

Marcia had come into the copse.

She stood looking down at Audrey, fast asleep.

Slowly the tears gathered in her eyes. She turned to where Dick stood a little way behind her.

"Only three weeks, and look at her!" she said, in a low voice. Then, on a sudden impulse, she added: "No, don't look!"

It seemed to her that no one should look; she turned away herself. Audrey's soul lay at the mercy of any onlooker—there, in her tired face—her pained and weary soul—hurt so sorely: all her barriers were down, swept away by the deep sleep of exhaustion. The shadows beneath her eyes told of tragedy; the lines of her young mouth spoke of the pain of hopelessness.

Marcia went softly away. She sat on a tree-trunk out of sight, and wiped her eyes.

"Don't do that," Dick urged. "She's so young, you know—"

"Don't add that she will get over it! Oh yes, she will, to the extent that she'll go on living—if it can be called living: she will eat and drink and talk, and in the years to come the pain will be a dull one instead of sharp. Then when she's old, she'll be lonely, and she will love to sit and dream of all this. That's all. She isn't an ordinary girl, Dick. Can't you see that? I saw it years ago. I said that her life could hold an awful tragedy or a wonderful happiness. Well, it's the tragedy. And it's a

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

tragedy for Martin, too. And all the work of one obstinate old man!"

"D' you think if you went to him?" he suggested.

"I'll try it. But I know beforehand that it will be no use. He has sworn, and on his dead wife's Bible."

They sat silent, while the summer world around them sang and danced in the golden light, in the joyous sunshine that pushed its way through the trees, using every tiniest gap and loophole to work its yellow way through on to the bushes and bracken beneath.

"I know no one dies of love nowadays," Marcia said, gloomily, "but I'm not at all sure if something is not done that that child won't. She's such a plucky little thing, but in a way her very pluck is against her—it wears her out. All day long she is fighting, and I don't expect she gets much rest at night."

"Well, I don't know; I thought yesterday she seemed very bright. She was playing cricket with the boys, and teasing Bobbie."

Marcia smiled at him.

"Oh, Dick, you're very nice, but you're very much a man! Now go away. She won't want you when she wakes."

"Will she want you? Because I do, you know."

"Don't be foolish. Now go."

It was half an hour later that Audrey woke. Marcia had moved so that through the tree-trunks she could just see a bit of her frock. When she stirred she rose softly, and went to her.

Audrey turned, her eyes scared.

"Have I been asleep?"

"Yes, dear."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"For long?"

"Yes, a nice, long sleep."

"Oh, why didn't you wake me? Why did you let me sleep? It was cruel! Oh, it was cruel!" She hid her face in her hands; then she stood up and smiled. "I'm sorry. I think I was still half asleep."

"Don't pretend with me, child."

Audrey's lips quivered.

"It's only that I don't sleep very well at night," she said, "and I thought it would make me more wakeful—sleeping now."

"No, I don't think so. You have been too tired to sleep. Audrey"—her voice was very caressing—"can't you ever cry?"

She shook her head.

"I used to cry very easily when I was a child. A little while ago I cried over a book that ended sadly. But I can't now."

"Haven't you, since Martin went?"

It was the first time any one had mentioned his name to her in these three weeks. Marcia did it deliberately. She saw her wince, but her eyes remained feverishly bright.

"No," she said. "I don't know why."

She put up her hand to her eyes.

Into Marcia's mind flashed:

*"Break, thou deep vase of chilling tears,
That grief hath shaken into frost!"*

She knew that somehow she must make Audrey cry. Audrey looked at her with a miserable little smile.

"I think it's all here," she tapped her brow.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Frozen," Marcia said.

Audrey glanced at her, startled.

"It—feels like that," she said, in a low voice.

"Oh, my dear! My dear!" Marcia said.

She bent forward and kissed her.

"Will you come home with me to-night?"

"No, thank you."

"I want you, dear. And you are nearer the Hall. I will send to your mother."

"Very well, thank you."

Marcia knew that she did not wish to come; she knew that she shrank from meeting any one, even Dick; she knew that she had assented because of that very shrinking. That was how she was fighting.

"I want to have a quiet evening—just we two," she said. "Dick is going to a bachelor's dinner at Millthorpe. We'll have just a little simple dinner in my room, shall we?"

"Yes, please. Sha'n't we have the boys? It wouldn't matter their going to bed late for once, would it? You are very particular about their bedtimes, aren't you? Do you think that is why they are all so well and strong? Dickie isn't so strong as the others, of course, but she is never really ill, is she?"

Marcia's heart ached; these outbursts of conventional talk hurt her—they were so different from Audrey's old manner.

They had a cosey little dinner. Audrey said she enjoyed it immensely. She said it at intervals.

"How nice it is here! . . . Isn't it cosey! . . . I do like having dinner like this!" And each word rang to Marcia's sensitive ear with that conventional note—the note called

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

forth by her saying and doing what she considered she ought to say and do, and not what she would have liked to do, which would have been to keep silence.

After dinner Marcia talked, always with the object before her of breaking down that terrible calm of Audrey's. She talked of Martin, of his boyhood, till the white pain in the patient little face opposite her choked back the words, and she talked of other things. But all the while her mind was worrying as to how she could achieve her end.

At last the thought of Bobbie came into her mind. She tried to see her impartially, to get rid of all sentiment, and still she thought that a drowsy, loving Bobbie—a fat night-gowned Bobbie—might do what she had failed to do. Audrey's nerves were highly strung from the talk about Martin. Bobbie's soft embraces might be successful.

"I'm just going to peep at the boys," she said, and left the room.

Her heart failed her when she stood looking down on Bobbie, fast asleep, with a bear clasped in her arms. But inexorably she bent and roused her.

"Holloa!" Bobbie said, and shut her eyes again.

"Wouldn't it be lovely to come down-stairs into mother's room for a little while?" Marcia wheedled.

"—loa!" grunted Bobbie.

"Just you, sweet, and it's *so* late! You would be just like a grown-up, wouldn't you?"

Bobbie roused a little.

"Bob be a grown-up."

"Yes, dear. Audrey is down there. You love Audrey, don't you?"

"Be a grown-up."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Come along, then. Won't it be nice to hug Audrey?"

"Hug Audrey," Bobbie agreed, with a drowsy smile.

Marcia, looking at her, thought she must succeed; truly Bobbie, flushed with sleep, was adorable.

"Take little b'ar."

"No, darling, leave the bear in bed."

"Bob *want* little b'ar."

Marcia, with a dim idea that the requisite hugs might be bestowed on the bear, instead of on Audrey, were he allowed to accompany them, refused to let him leave the bed.

She carried Bobbie down-stairs, planted her in Audrey's lap, and with some excuse, left the room.

"Want little b'ar," said Bobbie, frowning.

"Is he up-stairs, dear?"

"In bed. Bob want to go back to bed." She wriggled off Audrey's lap onto the floor. "Bob goin' back." She trotted with fat determination towards the door.

"You must wait here till mother comes back, darling."

"Bob won't. Want little b'ar. Go 'way. Want little b'ar."

Poor Bobbie, she was very sleepy and very cross.

Audrey put her arms round her. Bobbie kicked vigorously; then slipped to the floor, and lay there, on her stomach, howling.

"Want little b'ar! Ooh! O-o-o-h! Want to go back to bed! Oh! Ooh! Oooh! Go 'way, bad ole thing! Bob don't yove you a bit! Oh, *dear*! Want little b'ar! Oh! Oh!"

Marcia hurried in. Bobbie was carried back to her bed, weeping bitterly.

It was the next morning, soon after breakfast, that

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Dick came ruefully to Marcia, deep in housekeeping duties.

"I say, I'm afraid I've done it! I'm an awful fool—a blundering ass!"

His face was full of guilty compunction; he looked wretched.

"What have you done?" Marcia said.

"Why, I wanted to cheer Audrey up a bit, and I thought nothing could do it like a visit to the stables. There's nothing like horses for driving away the blues, so I always find. And I thought she looked pale, although she was talking quite cheerfully. So I took her off. I say, Marcia, you'll think I'm an awful fool!"

"Never mind that," she said, half smiling; "go on."

"Well, you know that chestnut Martin bought of me is still here, and, as luck would have it, I took her straight to Topsy, who's in the next stall to Redcap. And you know how she used always to go and see him with Martin—take him sugar, and that sort of thing. Well, she turned her back to his stall—only looked at Topsy; and the chestnut stretched up, and he gave a sort of whinney, and I said, like a fool: 'He's jealous. Go round to him.' And she stood a minute with an awful queer look, and then suddenly she ran round to him and burst out crying. He sort of nozzled into her neck, you know. By Jove, it was horrid sort of crying, poor little soul! I thought I'd better come away. I fairly ran, and shut the door. She's in there now. I'm awfully sorry I was such a fool as to take her to the stables."

"Oh, Dick," Marcia said, her eyes full of tears, "you're not a fool, but a genius!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

"[T's my belief that before winter's here she and I will both be laid beneath the ground," Amelia said, peeling potatoes.

"You are a morbid fool," Susan replied, strongly.

"Fool or no fool, I can see death in a face when it's there to be seen."

"And when it isn't. Be quiet."

Susan's tone silenced her for the time being. But lately Amelia's awe of Susan had lessened, overpowered a good deal by the strength of the lachrymose mood that was always upon her now. Presently she went on, in the rambling monologue habitual to her lately:

"A person who's as sensitive as I am can see deeper than them who are as hard as a piece of wood. There was the love of my youth, too—"

"I shouldn't think you would be proud of that incident," Susan put in, harshly.

Amelia was not immediately cowed, as she had been wont to be by such a remark.

"I've nothing to be ashamed of. I was young and innocent and loving, that's all."

"The way you chased him to England was disgraceful, and you know it. You knew then that he was a married man."

"I didn't! I couldn't believe it! I didn't know that

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

men were so wicked. You are a hard woman, Susan. Any one would think that you'd never done or thought a thing that wasn't quite straight."

Susan dropped the cloth she had been folding; she faced Amelia.

"Well, have I?" she said, with an air which had a sort of superb defiance about it.

Amelia blinked and fumbled among the potatoes.

"How can I tell?" she said, fretfully. "We're none perfect. We're all miserable sinners. It says so in the Prayer-book. I'm sure I never meant any harm, whatever I may have done. You never can look forward and see how things will turn out. And now it's fretting me to death to see her poor little white face, and her so brave and bright with it all, and that kind to me it pierces my heartstrings, and all the time I know what I know." The tears were trickling down her face now and dropping among the potato skins. "I was never meant to be a Judas," she muttered, wretchedly.

Susan stood very still; the color had left her face slowly as Amelia mumbled on. She had presented her with a new and terrible idea. She said nothing, but turned and went quietly from the room, up the stairs, and into her bedroom, where she locked the door, and, as was her custom, went and stood by the window.

Strange as it may seem, the idea had never entered her mind before. She had seen Audrey growing pale and thin; she had seen the strain in her eyes; had seen what an effort it was to her to eat, but the idea had not entered her mind. She had reassured herself with platitudes about the tryingness of the extreme heat; about the healing powers of Time; the effervescent nature of

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

such maladies in youth. She had suffered acutely because Audrey was suffering, but this idea presented by Amelia had never entered, in the vaguest form, into her mind.

Give her child up!

Now she grappled with the hideous thought. In her mind dinned the words of that weak and foolish mother: "O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." Never! She would sooner see Audrey dead! She was hers—hers! She could not belong to that other woman—that woman who thought of nothing but her frocks and gayeties. She had not known her when they met. If Audrey were her child, she must have felt it. Amelia was a fool. What did she know? Nothing! She could only suspect. And in her weak sentimentality she would have her give up Audrey—publish the fact abroad that she was that woman's child—so that she could marry the man she cared for. But she was not that woman's child. She was hers! And she would never give her up. Never! She moved suddenly to the wardrobe, and, taking the key from her pocket, unlocked the lower drawer. She took out a neatly folded bundle, and, with hands that shook, unrolled it. A tiny chemise fluttered to the ground—a delicate, dainty thing, trimmed with Valenciennes lace—a baby's chemise, curiously out of accord with the hands that picked it up and then flung it contemptuously aside. She flung aside also a little nightgown trimmed with the same lace; then she stood holding in her hands a long flannel petticoat, daintily embroidered, and with the initials "B. M. H.-D." worked in the corner. It was at these letters Susan stared, her face distorted with passion. Once she made as if she would tear the flannel to shreds, but

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

instead she dropped it into the drawer, and, rising, went back to the window. Her mind was working now over all the old arguments. Ever since that day, nineteen years ago, when, strong again after her long illness, she had looked through her baby's clothing, and had found there the tiny chemise and petticoat and nightgown, she had used, over and over again, the same arguments. She could see now the pretty Irish girl who had been looking after her baby. She could hear the replies that, with their strong accent, had nearly driven her mad: "Sure, thin, they were the purty clothes the darlint had worn when the sailor bhoy gave her into her own arms. Wet through the wee thing had been, with the waves splashing into the boat. And her ould nurse lying unconscious, and dead this three months and more, God rest her sowl! Was it how had they known who the baby was belonging to? Hadn't the ould nurse been holding her, for all she was like dead? And wasn't the ould nurse her honor's own servant? And wasn't her honor in the same boat, too, with her poor head bandaged, where she'd been knocked down and hit it against something sharp? Oh, a terrible sight she was, and them never thinking she'd live after all she'd been through! Was it know her own baby thin? And her next door to dead and more! 'Twas herself, Molly O'Leary, had received the wee thing into her own arms. And hadn't she whipped off her wet clothes in a minute, and had all her snug and warm?" Yes, she could see and hear it all as clearly now as she had seen and heard it nineteen years ago. She could even smell the curious scent that rose from the turf fires of that quaint little Irish village. She could see, too, the list of those drowned as she had read it in the old newspaper one

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

day when the rain was pattering on the window while the sun shone and the birds sang:

Robert Arthur Robertson.

Alice Gowham.

William Jones.

Wallace Alexander Hartley-Dent.

Barbara Muriel Hartley-Dent.

John Abbotsford.

Richard Greening.

John Henry Charles Fielding.

Mrs. Cooper.

Ambrose Cooper.

Marian A. Cooper.

Archibald Henderson.

Name by name she went through the list. She had never forgotten it. Each name was burned into her memory, just as she had read it that morning in the stuffy little parlor of the village "hotel." Only one name sometimes wavered before her eyes; there were times when shudderingly, in spite of herself, she would find herself substituting one name for another—watching, as it were, the effect when she read in between Wallace Alexander Hartley-Dent and John Abbotsford the name Audrey Mary Fielding instead of Barbara Muriel Hartley-Dent. She did it now. Out against the blue distance she read the words "Audrey Mary Fielding" over and over again. . . . That day, months after, when Amelia had come to the gray cottage. . . . It had been a wet, cold day in winter. Amelia had been weary and draggled and ill; she had been hysterical, full of her ill-treatment at the hands of her quon-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

dam lover. She had laughed and cried and stared oddly at the child asleep in her cradle. She had said, staring at the baby, that she must tell Susan something that she had come to tell her, and Susan, in an agony of fear, had put her off. And that was all. Amelia had been ill; she had stayed in bed for weeks, and she had never told. What was it she had been going to tell on that bleak winter's day? Was it only that she saw a difference in the child? That she felt she was not Susan's? Or did she know something? She said that she had come to tell something. Had she seen that other baby taken into another boat—the boat that went down? Had she? But she had not been in that boat. She could not know. In the awful rush and terror, how could she be sure of anything? If she had seen a baby carried into the ill-fated boat she could not have been sure it was Susan's baby. Why should it be? Wouldn't nurse Ridley naturally have Susan's baby in her charge? It was the poor little Hartley-Dent child who had been taken into the other boat. It must have been. She averted her eyes from those baby garments; but she still saw them, as she always saw them, with the frivolous lace, and the B. M. H.-D. worked in the corner of the petticoat . . .

They had been washed ashore . . . the Irish girl had made a mistake; they had not been worn by her baby—by the baby who was saved. They were part of the wardrobe of the baby who was drowned. In all the excitement caused in that Irish village by the wreck of the *Victoria*, and the arrival of their boat, a mistake could so easily have been made . . .

And was it likely that nurse Ridley would take up the wrong child? . . . And her own words bereft the last

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

thought of all power to comfort. . . . They repeated themselves in her brain—"excitement—a mistake could so easily have been made . . ."

She remembered the storm; the sudden crash; the noise; the bewilderment and terror, and inexorably she told herself that it was possible the woman had seized up the wrong child. And with colorless lips, locked in an uncompromising line, with the last thought in her mind, she knelt before the drawer to put away the chemise and petticoat, she said:

"She is mine! I will never give her up! I will let her die sooner!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

DICKIE crept to her softly across the lawn. "When Snippet died I felt very bad for months and months," she said.

Audrey stroked her head.

"Who was Snippet, sweet?"

"A wee little Yorkshire terrier. She took a lot of prizes at dog shows. I used to hope dreffly that she would have puppies. I used to pray God every night to send her three, and in the morning I used to creepity-creep to her basket, but she never had any. Nurse said it was because she wasn't married. We were going to marry her to Euphemia, and then she died. I think it was ap—appendicitis, because she swallowed a bit of bone, which Euphemia had stolen and left. It made you hurt dreffly when you saw her all cold and dead. That's why I know how you feel. You see, I'm not going to worry you. Mother told me you were sad, when I asked her, and she said I wasn't to worry you."

"You never could worry me, Dickie."

Dickie rubbed her cheek up and down against her hand.

"Dear, will it worry you if I say a wicked thought?"

"No."

"You see, I thought it when I woke up this morning. It's *very* wicked."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Tell it to me, Dickie."

"Don't you think God *might* have come down with that poor little Jesus just at first when He was all among horses and cows and things? Because, how would Jesus know not to get behind their hoofs?"

"He couldn't walk, you goose," observed Jimmy, who had come up behind them. "And God gave Him a mother. What *I* want to know is: Did they have buttons in the Garden of Eden, Audrey?"

"No."

"Did they have hooks?"

"No, dear."

"*Tapes*, then?"

"No."

"Then *how* did Adam and Eve keep the leaves on?"

There was a little pause.

"Euphemia, drop that ball! She's eaten two already this morning!"

"Jimmy, how dirty you are! Where have you been?"

"Oh, climbing," said Jimmy, airily. "Au 'voir, dearest!"

"I *must* go and see what she's been doing," said Dickie. Audrey smiled.

"So you saw the demon in her eye, too, did you?"

That afternoon, Audrey, who had lunched at the Hall, went to see Mrs. Forbes. She went chiefly because, in her zeal, she had come to look upon all the things she had a special repugnance to doing as the things she must do. She was wearing herself out in her very efforts not to give way. She hated the sight of the Professor, because he had written to Martin's father and gossiped unwarrantably. She had, of course, no idea that his letter had been

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

actuated by a petty spite, and she was sure that it really had made no difference: Hilary Jocelyn's feeling went too deep for that. But still she disliked him for his meddling and his association in such an unpleasing light with her and Martin.

She was surprised, as she left the house, to find herself accompanied by an excessively sedate Jimmy and equally sedate Tommy.

"May we come with you, dear?"

"But I'm going to call on Mrs. Forbes."

They knew that. Might they come?

So they set out together. Audrey looked doubtfully at the two children in their immaculate white embroidered frocks.

"You will be good?" she said.

"Oh yes!"

They found Mrs. Forbes entertaining.

Once Audrey would have shrunk shyly from entering the stiff room where four people sat round stiffly; sipping tea stiffly; talking stiffly; keeping silence stiffly. Mrs. Forbes was a shockingly bad hostess; she had no idea of making people talk. When she talked herself she invariably chose a topic she had better have avoided.

Audrey entered the room quite serenely now. Lately all people and things seemed the same to her, except the few she loved. She greeted Lady Horleigh calmly, though once that stout and autocratic dame had filled her with terror.

Mrs. Forbes was nervously effusive.

"Do talk," she whispered, and so effectually sealed her lips.

"Isn't it a beautiful day!" Jimmy observed to Miss Morley.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Miss Morley was intellectual, and did not care for children.

"Yes," she said.

"Isn't it a beautiful day!" Tommy echoed to Mrs. Sinclair.

Mrs. Sinclair had five very plain children, and considered that the little Barringtons were overdressed and overpraised.

"Yes," she said.

Tommy started making the most awful grimaces.

"Audrey," she whispered, "I'm going to laugh! I am!"

"Don't be foolish, Tommy!"

Tommy fixed her eyes on the trees beyond the open windows.

Mrs. Forbes suddenly ejaculated:

"Isn't it a beautiful day!"

"Lovely," Audrey agreed, seriously. "There is a breeze, too, to-day. It has been so fearfully hot lately."

"Perfect weather," let fall Lady Horleigh in sonorous tones.

Tommy began to gabble audibly:

*"I stood beneath a hollow tree, the blast it hollow blew;
I thought upon the hollow world, and all its hollow
crew:*

*Ambition and its hollow schemes, the hollow hopes we
follow,*

Imagination's hollow dreams—all hollow, hollow, hollow!"

"You have not been asked to recite, Sybil," Lady Horleigh said, disapprovingly.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Mary," observed Mrs. Sinclair, "is a year younger than Sybil, and she recites with infinitely more expression."

Tommy, with a very red face, repeated desperately:

"Imagination's hollow dreams—all hollow, hollow, hol—"

A giggle tittered across the room, another and another.

Audrey said, hurriedly, to Lady Horleigh:

"Were you caught in that storm yesterday?"

"Why," cried Mrs. Forbes, "couldn't Eve catch the measles?"

"Oh," squealed Tommy, rocking with laughter, "how awfully funny!"

Jimmy considered gravely; the others looked bored.

"Don't tell us," Audrey said. "Let us think."

Lady Horleigh smiled with bland indulgence.

"I give it up," she said, with an air that palpably proclaimed riddles as being beneath her consideration.

"Why, because of Adam, you see," Mrs. Forbes explained, with a triumphant smile.

"Oh—yes," they murmured, vaguely.

Tommy continued to laugh as if she thought it exquisitely funny. Tommy was given, at times, to these seizures. She had found "All hollow" a preventive on some occasions; now it had failed her.

"I think a good riddle rather amusing sometimes," Mrs. Forbes pleaded.

"Oh yes" (Audrey came to her rescue), "the greatest minds need relaxation at times." There was the ghost of her old demure mischief in her smile.

From Jimmy came a clear and courteous little:

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I don't understand the answer. Will you explain it, please?"

Mrs. Forbes smiled indulgently.

"Don't you see, dear? You mean one can have measles twice? But it is hardly usual, and, for a riddle, one must not be too particular."

"You said," explained Jimmy, ruthlessly—she had had experience of Mrs. Forbes' riddles before this—"you said, 'Why couldn't Eve have the measles? Why, because of Adam, you see.' I don't understand."

Mrs. Forbes grew very red.

"Oh, did I say that really? How very silly!" She laughed nervously. "I meant to say, of course, because she had got Adam—I mean, because she'd 'ad 'em! Oh, dear, I am silly this afternoon!"

"Oh!" said Jimmy. "I see now, thank you."

"Ooh!" gurgled Tommy.

"Your cousin, Mr. Jocelyn, is not staying with you now, is he?" Miss Morley addressed Jimmy, with a keep-your-distance air.

"No," said Jimmy. "Miss Fenwick says she expects he'll go and shoot big game now."

Miss Fenwick was their governess.

"Oh, indeed! Why does she expect that?"

"I don't know. She says they always do."

Miss Morley's eye lost some of its cold intellectuality. She fixed her glasses on her nose—she had a high-bridged nose made for glasses—and looked at Audrey.

"There is a good deal to be said for the shooting theory," she observed. "A little danger, and the phase is past and done with, while the—"

Lady Horleigh interrupted, blandly:

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Is Mrs. Barrington going to the Marchmont's 'At Home,' my dear?"

She spoke to Audrey. She had disapproved strongly of the rumored suggestion of a marriage between her and Martin. She held old-fashioned ideas about birth and family; but now, as the affair had evidently fallen through, owing no doubt to Martin's good sense, or perhaps to Audrey's, she felt kindly disposed to the latter, and in her slow, deep voice calmly annihilated Miss Morley.

It was at this juncture that Professor Forbes entered the room. He was wearing an old coat, which had been black once and was now green, and on his feet were a pair of carpet slippers, blue with gay pink roses trailing about his toes.

He frowned undisguisedly when he saw that the room was full of people, and studied his watch with rude suggestiveness.

"Professor," Miss Morley began, humbly, "*could* you let me have a copy of that article you wrote in last month's *Science*? I *long* to read it. I have heard that it is simply wonderful!"

"I haven't any copies, except my own. I always keep one. You can order *Science* from Robinson's. Martha, I want to speak to you."

Mrs. Forbes glanced from one to another with scared apology.

"Oh yes, Ambrose! Certainly. These great men, you know—an idea—so precious—"

The visitors departed, so quickly does rudeness that is sufficiently courageous achieve its end.

Audrey, in obedience to a glance from Mrs. Forbes, stayed.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I am on the eve," quoth the Professor, as the door closed behind Lady Horleigh, "of an Immense Discovery!"

Mrs. Forbes fluttered. Jimmy and Tommy exchanged eager glances. The Professor ignored them.

"I call it advisedly, and after due thought, an Immense Discovery. I am not given to the thoughtless use of Words, as you know, Martha. I disapprove of the Modern Tendency to Slang and Exaggeration in Speech. But, having carefully weighed the words, I still declare that I am on the eve of an Immense Discovery. Come with me, Martha."

She followed him, looking proud and anxious.

"Will you wait here? I want to send a message to Mrs. Barrington," she whispered to Audrey.

"Please, may we come too, Professor Forbes?" asked Jimmy.

"Certainly not!"

"We'll be most awfully quiet."

"Martha, don't allow those children to worry me!"

The children cut capers and looked supremely pleased with themselves.

In a little while Mrs. Forbes returned. The flush on her face had grown deeper with her nervous efforts to understand the nature of the Professor's discovery and to say the right thing at the right moment. In her hand she carried something with an air of supreme care.

"The Professor allowed me to bring just one to show you."

They crowded round. Mrs. Forbes opened her hand and disclosed—nothing.

The boys laughed hilariously.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I've dropped it! Oh, my dears, don't laugh! Do help me to find it. It will look so careless! It is very precious. I can't think *how* I came to lose it! Don't make a noise! Find it quickly, if you can. I wouldn't have the Professor know for worlds!"

Jimmy pounced on a little crumpled rose-leaf lying in the hall.

"Here it is, Mrs. Forbes!"

"Oh, thank you, dear! Oh, thank you. Give it to me. Now, look, Audrey! Is it not wonderful?"

Audrey looked. She saw a petal of a Gloire de Dijon rose, crumpled, limp, and spotted all over with scarlet dots.

"Oh, how horrid! Poor little thing. Is it some new kind of blight?"

Mrs. Forbes cast her a glance of outraged horror.

"Blight! It is an Immense Discovery! You do not understand. How should you?" pityingly. "But living with a mind like the Professor's, one learns to appreciate the Marvellous Value of a Discovery like this! The thought and the—er—ingenuity that—that—" Her memory failed her. "He sprayed the rose-bush with the stuff he'd made, and two of the roses have blossomed like this!" she finished, with a sad lack of style and polish. She was very much excited; she hurried them away with apologetic references to the notes connected with the Discovery which she must begin to copy out.

When they were in the hall the Professor emerged once more.

"What! still here?" he said, peevishly. "Martha, I want you!"

On the way home Audrey shuddered.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Imagine a world of spotted roses!"

"You needn't worry, dearest," Jimmy assured her, sweetly, "it was only—red ink! Tommy and I did it this morning."

"We were up in his apple-tree yesterday," added Tommy, "and we heard him talking a lot of rubbish to Mrs. Forbes about some old smelly chemical he'd made that was to rev—rev—"

"Revolutionize the World of Color," interpolated Jimmy. "And he watered the rose-bush with some of the stuff, you see; so we crept down there this morning with a bottle of red ink and a brush, and spotted two new roses that had come out in the night."

"So that was why you wanted to come with me this afternoon?" Audrey said.

"Of course, dear," assented Jimmy.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MARCIA called to see Susan.

She knew that Audrey was out.

"I am going to Paris," she said, "and I want to know if you will spare Audrey, and let her come with us."

There was a pause.

Susan sat erect, her hands folded in her lap.

"I hope the change of air and scene may do her good," Marcia went on.

"The air of a city can't be so good as the air here," Susan replied.

"Everything will be new and strange to her, her mind will be distracted. You will forgive my speaking plainly, I know, but I think that if something is not done she will have a serious illness."

Directly she had spoken she wished she had not said it—and there had been no need to say it. The drawn look on the odd little lined face before her told her that. Susan had seen, had understood. She might have known that she would. Susan said nothing; she passed it over with a patience that made Marcia think of Audrey. They sat silent. Marcia understood now that Susan was hesitating only because she was not sure if the plan would be beneficial to Audrey. She had put herself aside.

"I believe," Marcia said, at last, very gently, "that it would be good for her."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Very well," Susan said; and added, wearily, "It is very kind of you."

"Oh no, we love to have her. It is kind of you to let us have her."

When Marcia had gone Susan returned to the parlor, and sat down as if she were tired. To her this having to let Audrey go argued, in a small degree, failure on her part. The morbid self-analysis, quite foreign to her nature, and induced only by the exceptional circumstances attending her relationship to Audrey, set her worrying furtively over the surely well-known fact that, in times of trouble, a mother should be first with her child, should be her best help, her greatest rest. Yet it was necessary for Audrey's health, presumably to her peace of mind, to leave her. The hurtful thought presented itself: "Would she find rest with Mrs. Hartley-Dent?"

Amelia put her head round the door.

"What did she want, Susan?"

"Audrey is going abroad with her."

"Best thing she can do, too! And she ought to go on the Continent anyway; all the swells do. Maybe one of those handsome, dark-eyed foreigners 'll catch her poor heart at the rebound, as they say. I'm sure I hope so, poor lamb. Only she'd best be careful, and her so innocent! They do say the men on the Continent are terribly wicked and fascinating."

"Audrey isn't a fool."

Susan looked with distaste at Amelia. Amelia had grown careless lately in her dress; now her bodice was hooked crookedly; at the throat it gaped; even her curls hung lank and limp, obviously not having been curled the night before. Her vanity was failing her, and

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Susan did not understand the grave import of the fact.

"You call all people fools who have soft hearts," she complained.

"And heads," said Susan, shortly.

"The Almighty made women soft and loving," Amelia argued, mournfully. "All these hussies nowadays aping men's ways aren't women, and they can't be men, and so they're just half and half—a set of miserable creatures who are never really happy. Who wants them? Men don't want to marry them; women don't want them for friends. They've got no real place in the world and they know it, and that's why they make such a noise shouting for their rights. They're like wild beasts roaring for their food."

It had begun to rain. Susan was looking out anxiously.

"Audrey will be wet."

"She don't mind the rain. She's often come in smiling like a flower after an April shower," said Amelia, poetically.

But Susan knew that nowadays Audrey did not enjoy the wet and cold; she shrank from them.

She came in presently. The keen autumn air had given her no bright color; she looked pinched and tired.

"You are wet," Susan said. "You must change your things."

"I'm not very wet." She shivered as she spoke. "It has turned very cold out, Mother."

"You shouldn't have stayed out so late. Where have you been?"

"Only walking. I went as far as Chudleigh."

"You have been out for three hours! And only to Chudleigh!"

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I don't know how it is, Mother, but my legs won't work properly lately. And there is such a strong wind to-day."

A strong wind! Susan went to the door, and peered through the dusk to where from a cottage chimney the smoke rose almost in a perpendicular line. Audrey called the slight breeze, that puffed out little offshoots of the smoke now and then, a strong wind. Susan sighed heavily.

When Audrey came down she found tea ready and Susan waiting for her.

"Oh, how nice, Mother! It's early, this afternoon."

"I thought you'd be cold."

"Tea will soon warm me. And my favorite little scones! You spoil me, Mother. Isn't Amelia coming in?"

"No; she never does now, you know."

"I had forgotten. Why do you think it is?"

"I don't know. She likes to sit over the kitchen fire and drink tea all day long."

"Poor Amelia, she has never been really well since she had influenza."

"There's nothing the matter with her except idleness. Audrey, I have a piece of good news for you."

"Yes, Mother?"

"Mrs. Barrington was here this afternoon. She came to ask me if I would let you go abroad with her—to Paris, first—and I agreed."

"Must I go, Mother?"

"You don't want to go?"

Audrey shook her head.

"I would sooner stay here with you. Need I go?"

Susan's eyes were searching as they rested on the wistful face.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I thought you would be glad," she said.

"No. Let me stay here with you, Mother."

Susan did not answer at once. There was a great thankfulness in her heart, but it ached over Audrey, too.

"It is for your health," she said.

"Oh, Mother, I am quite well and strong! It is only this sudden cold weather makes me look pale. Mother, I like to be at home—quite quiet—with only you—best of all. Let me stay. I—I have been moping and selfish. I will try to be different—"

"Don't, Audrey! No! it isn't that."

"You think"—the words came haltingly—"I—may forget—if I see new things—and people. I shall never forget, Mother."

There was a quiet strength in her voice that, for a moment, made Susan realize the greatness of her love for Martin. She looked at her hopelessly.

"But I will try more, Mother. It's only—that I can't sleep very well—and eating has grown so difficult somehow. I needn't go, need I?"

But in that moment of realization all Susan's fears for her had taken on an added sharpness.

"You must," she said, strenuously—"you must."

Audrey looked at her wearily.

"Very well," she said.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ONE morning Amelia did not get up. When Susan went up to her room she found her in bed crying.

"I'm ill," Amelia sobbed. "I feel that low-spirited and miserable. I dreamed all night of a corpse laid out. I'll never get up again. I feel it in my bones."

"Of course you won't if you insist on lying there," Susan said. "Don't be ridiculous, Amelia! Get up at once!"

"Oh, I'm not frightened of you any more! You can't harm a poor dead person, and that's what I shall be soon. I ache all over my body, and my throat's sore. If it hadn't been that I always had such a spirit I'd have been in my bed long ago. And here I am now, and here I stay till I die, Susan Fielding!"

Later Susan sent for Dr. Lawson.

He pronounced Amelia to be suffering from another attack of influenza.

"Keep her in bed for the present, and cheer her up as far as possible. She is very low-spirited—a common feature in influenza—excessive depression. Her heart is weaker than I like. Ah, well, cheer her up, cheer her up!"

Susan stood watching him go down the path to the gate, her mouth twisted in an ironical smile. She to cheer any one up! At the gate he turned and came back.

"I was nearly forgetting Miss Audrey. How is she

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

getting on? She likes Paris? A beautiful city. She was looking very pale and run down. Queer how young girls get run down for no reason—?" He paused on the word inquisitively, but, receiving no satisfaction, repeated "no reason at all! She—er—writes to you, I suppose?"

Susan, with an instinct to defend Audrey, found her tongue.

"Oh yes, she writes very often, in spite of her time being so taken up. She is going everywhere and seeing everything. Her letters are full of all the wonderful things she is seeing—churches and pictures and palaces. She says she is having a beautiful time."

"Um—ah—yes!" He stood staring down at the ground, his mind full of conjectures.

"Well, good-morning!" He roused himself at last, and went away dissatisfied.

Amelia grew more cheerful as the day wore on; she dearly loved the importance attached to invalidism. She found a great satisfaction in keeping up a continual mournful monologue consisting of reminiscences of the last illness of various defunct relatives and friends. That Susan neither listened nor heard in no wise affected her garrulity. Susan was there, sitting in the window, working, and that was enough for Amelia's convenience. She entirely failed to see the tragedy that lurked in the feverish hurry of Susan's needle; she did not see the tenseness in the stiff attitude of Susan's thin figure; she never noticed that as the times for the two posts—morning and evening—drew near, Susan became almost rigid in her determination not to give way to the restlessness that consumed her, and which found its only expression in the unnatural brightness of her eyes. She lived only for the posts in those days

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

when Audrey was away; she was waiting always to know how Audrey was. Marcia, in her thoughtfulness, wrote several times; Susan read and reread the scanty lines, striving to read hope into them. There was so little to say. . . . "She seems very much interested in the new life about her, but she still tires very easily. . . . Her appetite has been a little better the last few days. . . . She says she is enjoying it all immensely. . . . A spell of unnatural heat has taken away her appetite and pulled her down a good deal, but she assures me she feels quite all right. . . . She is always bright and cheerful. . . ."

That was all—meagre little sentences that brought with them no reassurance. Susan knew Audrey well enough to fail to get any satisfaction from those letters.

Audrey's own letters were dutiful descriptions of pictures and places and people, punctuated at correct intervals with remarks anent her great enjoyment of them and her good appetite. There was no heart in the carefully phrased sentences; all through them Susan read duty—duty—duty.

Strangely enough she bore no malice to Hilary Jocelyn. To her, his attitude was natural enough; he wanted the best for his son, and he did not consider John Fielding's daughter the best, that was all. It was very simple. She could conceive herself acting in the same way under similar circumstances. It was right that man or woman should fight for his or her child; it was a law of nature, one of the laws planted deep and strong in the human soul, and it never struck her to question its justice.

She found it more difficult to understand Audrey at this time. She understood, from sheer love, how the child was suffering, but she did not understand the cause of her

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

suffering. She had realized now that this was no slight and passing ailment, such as the small physical ills through which Audrey had passed; but she would never sound the depths of the child's love for Martin. But she respected her grief; she did not allow her sympathy to encroach; from her own reserved nature she realized acutely the reserve of Audrey's, and Audrey found her restful, sympathetic—she felt drawn more closely to her mother now than she had ever felt before.

For Susan there was always, pushed to the back of her mind, the hideous thought that Amelia had invoked that afternoon in her tearful remorse. Susan fought it still; she told herself again, on the occasions when it refused to be pushed from consideration, that she would see Audrey dead sooner than give her up. Yet the thought was terrible to her; the knowledge that, if she would, she might bring back life and joy to her child, and that she refused to do it, ate into her very heart. It poisoned her days and nights; drove sleep from her; turned life into one long, bitter struggle. Wearily she used the old, old argument—no one could be sure that Audrey was not her child. The fact that her baby had altered so much in those long weeks when she had known no one counted for nothing. She had been a poor little delicate thing only six weeks old when they had sailed from America. The long weeks of her own illness, spent in the beautiful air of that Irish village, had made the baby wax fat and big, strong and healthy, that was all. It was quite natural that she should have altered. If she had not been her child she would have known. She must have known. A woman could not help knowing. The clothes had been washed up on to the beach.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

All the old weary arguments, so old that they were rapidly losing all power of lightening, even momentarily, the load she always carried—had carried for nearly twenty years. She clung to them with a sort of mechanical clutching at any hope, born of long usage of them; she could not let them go—she could not afford to let them go, but they no longer helped her. The one argument, which really was no argument at all, and to which she invariably reverted in passionate revolt, was couched in terse and simple language: “She is mine. I feel it.”

Even now it brought her a momentary relief: it was so strong in its jealous certainty that it helped her even after its constant use for all these years. Her brain, wearily going over and over all the other time-worn arguments, held unconsciously this last one in reserve; it was always there, fighting that other thought of self-renunciation, seeking with guilty plausibility to prove the idea of the renunciation impossible.

As the days wore on Amelia lay in bed in a sort of maudlin content. Her appetite was bad, but she was still sufficiently greedy to eat when she was not hungry, so that on the whole she ate fairly well. The food really gave her no pleasure, but she found it difficult to break herself of a life-long habit. She wept sometimes, because all food was tasteless to her now, but she made an effort to eat it. She made no effort in any other direction; the weak slackness that had been always a large part of her nature had grown upon her lately, and now it culminated in a lachrymose inertia that Susan found extremely trying. She was quite incapable, too, of understanding it: to her strong nature it was quite inexplicable.

Amelia had ceased to take any interest in her personal

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

appearance; the curls straggled untidily across her brow. When she cried she did not, as a rule, trouble to wipe away the tears. She lay limp and lachrymose, and enjoyed a sort of negative happiness. Then a change came over her; the inertia was stirred by some worrying thought. She had been talking of her approaching death for days, till her maudlin complacency over the thought of her own decease and funeral irritated Susan beyond control. She turned on her sharply at last.

"You seem pretty sure that you're going straight to heaven."

Amelia had been saying, contentedly, that she would like to see the rector.

"It's only right I should," she had said. "My mother used to have beautiful talks with the rector before she died. I like everything done proper and nice, and I always had a way with me about religion. I can talk about the Bible folk and heaven as well as any one."

It was then that Susan broke in sharply.

Her words roused Amelia. The red color surged slowly into her pale face, her heavy eyes lost their sleepy content—they grew startled.

"I've never done anything wicked," she said. But there was a new note in her voice; memory was piercing through the heavy veil of complacency.

"It's well to be you, then," Susan said, curtly.

Amelia did not answer. Her flow of words seemed suddenly dried at their source. Her eyes followed Susan as she moved about the room, putting it in order. All that day she was strangely silent; for the first time she made no attempt to eat the food Susan brought to her. Her calmness had vanished; she turned restlessly in her bed,

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

moving her head from side to side. When Dr. Lawson came the next morning he found her worse.

"You are worrying again," he said, kindly.

The ready tears sprang to her eyes.

"I'm so timid, doctor! I always was so sensitive, and if I go to my grave without confessing, it won't be my fault, but the fault of them who are so hard on a poor woman, who never would harm a black-beetle knowingly—"

"Tell me your trouble. It will ease your mind. Come now, what is it? Something not very bad, I feel sure. Come, now. Let me help you."

"You're very kind." She hesitated, her eyes looking from him to Susan, who was standing stiff and still beside the bed.

"Tell me all about it," he said, soothingly. "I dare say I can ease your mind."

"Well—"

Susan's voice broke in, sharply, insistently:

"Isn't it the rector you want, Amelia?"

"Well, I don't know—"

"Your mother had the rector to talk to, you remember. It is the custom to have a clergyman, Amelia."

Amelia's thoughts were turned into a new channel. Susan's figure relaxed suddenly into a tired stoop.

"Yes, I'll have the rector. My mother had beautiful long talks with her vicar before she died. We used to sit round and listen; it was just like being in church. And the texts she had at her finger-ends! Doctor, you'd never believe! Beautiful it was to hear how she'd fit a Bible text onto everything that was said. I've a way, too, with religious conversation. Yes, I'll have a long talk with the rector."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Susan went with the doctor down-stairs. He looked serious, and shook his head several times, uttering vague remarks about a surprising lack of stamina, a seriously low vitality reacting on her heart. Susan hardly heard him; she was not capable just then of clear attention. When he had gone she stayed down-stairs awhile; she felt that she must think, that she could not go back to Amelia yet. She told herself, with feverish fervor, that Amelia could have nothing to say to him that would hurt her or Audrey. She told herself so over and over again. She could only have suspicions that no one could prove to be true. But she braced herself for fresh battle; Amelia must not see the rector. She trembled at the thought that she might, by her action, be damning a human soul; but, trembling, she took up the fresh burden, and wore it with unyielding determination. She did not seek to hide from herself the nature of the thing she was doing; to her it was a terrible sin, but she did not hesitate. Amelia must not see the rector.

Going up-stairs again, she put her off with vague replies, and Amelia kept up a constant talk of her mother's conversations on her death-bed and her own sinfulness, over which she wept. She was not delirious, but her mind was weak, and she comforted herself a good deal by concocting the beautiful things she should say to the rector when he called. She continually carried on aloud a one-sided conversation.

"Mr. Southey, yes, we are all miserable sinners—good Lord, deliver us! The Prayer-book tells us so. And the Bible, too. 'There is none that doeth good, no, not one.' But I never meant to do any harm, and I've suffered—'A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance,' and

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

my countenance is sad and wet with tears—" Then she called to Susan and asked for her Bible.

"I must get some more texts ready. I find I've forgotten my Bible a bit lately. I can't carry on a proper conversation with the rector unless I look them up first."

She had forgotten her uneasiness again by now; she was full of the strange vanity that saw no further than the one idea of enacting her part correctly before the rector.

Susan found herself eying her with a vague surprise; she would never have expected Amelia to meet death in that spirit—Amelia, who was such a coward. She did not understand that Amelia's shallow nature had not yet realized the idea of death; that she was only occupied with the trappings of death, as it were; and for all her talk of her own decease, never went beyond the thought of proper discourse, a grand funeral, plenty of flowers, never realizing for a moment that the corpse beneath the flowers would be herself; that she would be gone, would know nothing of mourners, flowers, or funeral horses. This want of realization gave, as it so often does, a wrong idea of courage, of fortitude to meet what the future might hold. And Susan, in a vague way, was surprised.

The next afternoon Amelia was asleep, and Susan went down into the kitchen to make her some gruel. She was very tired, and her weary thoughts fastened with cruel relentlessness on her unrested mind, so that she stood staring for a while down at the gruel she was stirring, deaf to all outside sounds. It was at that moment that the rector came slowly up the path to the house. His lower lip was stuck out in a childish sort of self-pity; he was an old man now, who passed his life chiefly in his study dozing

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

over books and old sermons which he had preached so often that his parishioners could sleep through them with the comfortable assurance that they would miss no new germ of thought. Moreover, their consciences could not upbraid them, since even the strictest conscience could not desire them to do more than be able to quote from the sermon over their Sunday dinners, and they could do that with ease now from listening to the first heading.

To-day the old rector had been dragged from a comfortable fire, a dish of walnuts, and a book to walk two miles to see Amelia Harris. He could not remember who Amelia Harris was; his mind groped dimly over the old women to whom he gave tea, but he was very cold and very tired, and he could not remember. He tapped with his stick on the door; then, quickened into activity by the sight of a fire through a window, he pushed the door open and went in. With a childish smile of pleasure he ambled into the parlor, and held out his hands to the warmth of the fire.

He stood there for a few minutes, his thoughts back in the book he had been reading. It was not a book he read in public: it was called *The Vengeance of Red-handed Mike*. During the last few years the rector had indulged a latent taste for extremely sensational fiction, till it had developed into a guilty passion. The poor old man had hiding-places all round his study, where were secreted various highly colored paper-covered shilling shockers. Now he was longing to be back in his study, to discover what Mike had done with the dead body. He roused himself with a sigh and a furtive glance round the room; then he went quietly up the stairs, and knocked at the

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

only door that was shut. A voice bade him "Come in!" and he went in.

Amelia peered round at him excitedly; she was alone in the room. "Oh, Mr. Southey, I'm very near the end of this vale of tears, but I didn't expect you just yet." She glanced aggrieved at the Bible lying on the counterpane; she had meant to commit many more texts to her memory before he should pay his visit.

"You are ill," he said, vaguely.

"Yes, Mr. Southey, but suffering is the lot of mankind, not to mention womenkind, 'for men must work and women must weep,'" Amelia rambled on, somewhat mixed; "I have wept like Rachel weeping for her children." The word "children" seemed to bring back her memory. "I want to unburden my soul," she said, and as she said it Susan came into the room.

"Amelia should be asleep." She faced the rector, her breath coming quickly, as if she had been running.

"Yes, yes, I will go," he agreed, but Amelia called him back.

"I want to unburden my soul!" she cried. "I am a miserable sinner! Good Lord, deliver us!"

The rector pulled himself together, and sat down beside the bed. He took her hand gently.

"The Lord is very merciful," he said.

"I am a miserable sinner. We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord. I thought it was all for the best—I did evil that good might come, and I was frightened. I always was timid. He said to me once, 'You're a little mouse, Amelia.' Oh, he used to say sweet things to me, and me so innocent and drinking them all in as Gospel truth—" She fell to weeping so that she could not go on.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Susan said, stiffly:

"She ought not to be excited. She ought to be left alone." But she said it without particular force; her powers of thought, of acting, were numbed by the shock of finding the rector there. The rector stroked Amelia's hand and talked to her with vague gentleness.

"They that go down to the sea in ships," said Amelia, and Susan started forward.

"Won't you go now? The doctor said she was to be kept quiet. You are doing her harm—"

"She is afraid of what I'm going to tell you!" cried Amelia, her face suddenly grown spiteful. "Oh, she knows! I've always had my doubts, seeing as it's only natural a mother should know if a child was hers or not! Oh, I'm not the only one who's sinned, for all some folk hold their heads so high, and have no mercy on poor frightened creatures who wouldn't harm a black-beetle knowingly! 'Pride goeth before destruction!' You can't get away from the Bible. Pride always has a fall, Susan Fielding, and now you'll have to 'bend your head beneath the yoke.'"

"Do not excite yourself," the rector said. "Calm yourself. Turn your thoughts into a quiet channel of reflection."

"She is doing herself harm," Susan reiterated.

"You are afraid of me, Susan! You know what I can tell about the child—"

The words goaded Susan. She turned suddenly upon the troubled old man sitting huddled in his chair, anxiously seeking after the gentle platitudes with which he had soothed the few sick-beds in his parish for the last several years.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Go home!" she said, her intensity taking all rudeness from her words. "Do you understand? You will kill her! You can come another time when she is calmer. Go home now!" He rose with alacrity, his vague mind grateful for any definite lead.

"I want to unburden my soul!" Amelia cried. "She's a wicked woman, I tell you! Her guilty conscience is troubling her! 'A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband.' *She* wasn't a crown to him—or hasn't been since his death! And I was only a simple young girl. 'Blessed are the pure in heart.'"

The rector, murmuring soothing remarks, was sidling towards the door. Amelia's vagueness suddenly disappeared. Her face scarlet with spite and anger at his going, she screamed out:

"She isn't her child! She knows it as well as I do! Audrey isn't her child, I tell you! . . ."

The rector was old, and not very firm upon his feet. He had paused instinctively at Amelia's scream, but he found himself the next moment outside the closed door and being led down the stairs by Susan's firm hand.

At the foot he paused, and looked back hesitatingly. Susan spoke calmly through white lips.

"She is delirious," she said.

He nodded several times.

"I will come again. I can do no good now. Curious hallucination, very curious."

"Delirious minds always have curious hallucinations," she said.

"Yes, yes! They do! Very curious. You are keeping well yourself? Nursing is very tiring. Good-after-noon."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She watched him go with his little mincing step down the path. Then she shut the door, bolting it this time, and went back up the stairs to Amelia's room. She was going to hear now all that Amelia knew; she would face it all. She must know. It was curious that as she went up the stairs she seemed to smell suddenly a faint mustiness. Before her eyes there stood out, on a yellowed page, with the long 's's' that had so worried her: ". . . Doubt a Greater Mischief than Despair." Well, she would know soon now. Amelia's tone had rung with the certainty of knowledge: Amelia knew. There would be no more Doubt; she braced herself to meet Despair. Amelia glanced at her sharply when she entered the room, then cowered down into the pillows.

Susan came close to her, and stood looking down at her.

She said, in a level voice:

"You're to tell me what you meant just now."

Amelia began to shiver and cry.

"I didn't mean any harm! A woman has to cleanse herself of her secret sins before she dies! And it 'll be better for Audrey anyway—"

"Tell me what you meant!"

"Don't look at me like that. We're all alone in the house, and how do I know you won't murder me? I meant to tell you when I came here years ago. I only came for that; I didn't mean to stay. I meant to ask you to lend me enough money to go back to my uncle in America. I hadn't thought about you knowing then. I'd forgotten that a mother would be bound to know. But I soon guessed. I wasn't sure, but I thought you'd seen she wasn't yours—and then I got frightened. I

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

thought you'd be so angry you'd never give me my passage-money. I thought you'd turn me out—me, a simple young girl whose heart was broken, and all her money gone in finery to try and soften his wicked heart, before I believed he was a married man. How was I to believe he could be so wicked? Me—”

“Never mind that. Tell me at once.”

“I'm frightened of you, Susan! All my life I've been that timid. And p'raps you didn't know she wasn't yours, after all, or weren't certain anyway. That was what always stopped me telling you. I tried to find out. I used to listen when there was a storm, to try and find out what you did up in your room. You always shut yourself up through a storm. A guilty conscience, I said. I suffered a lot, first, through his cruelty—”

“Tell me! Do you hear? Tell me at once!”

Her almost brutal lack of sympathy, her inexorability, suddenly goaded Amelia into a spurious burst of courage.

“All right, I'll tell you! You know well enough she isn't your child, in spite of her clothes! I'm sure of it! Other people might be deceived, but her own mother 'd have to know.” Then lapsing again into her rambling monologue, she went on: “How were that poor Alice, who was drowned, and me to know that we'd be wrecked that night? Just two young girls fond of an innocent bit of fun, who'd no thought of harm—”

Susan stood, staring down at her; the pressure she was putting upon herself was terrible; she realized that only by leaving Amelia to tell her tale in her own way would she ever hear it in its entirety. So she stood there motionless, though Amelia's first words had sent the blood surging through her veins; had set her heart beating, her head

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

throbbing, so that the contrast between her inner turmoil and her outer stillness had something terrifying about it that Amelia vaguely felt and resented.

"Don't stand so near!" she cried, fretfully. "Go away, or I can't talk!"

Susan moved stiffly and slowly away to the window.

The short afternoon was growing into a dark, stormy evening. To Susan the great gray clouds moving sulkily before the rising wind were the sea. She was even conscious of a hope that the red sun setting stormily in the west would not send its rays over into that sea—red in a gray sea. She wanted Amelia to go on; wanted it so terribly that she, quietest of women, almost screamed her want aloud. And she dared say nothing. So much—everything—rested with the tearful-eyed woman lying in bed staring vaguely at the window! A wrong word might seal her weak and obstinate lips.

Susan clinched her hands and looked out of the window.

"Where was I?" Amelia muttered.

"Two young girls fond of an innocent bit of fun," Susan prompted, in a labored sort of way.

"That was me and Alice. Great friends we were, her having a young man in England too, and only taking the place as nurse because Mrs. Hartley-Dent paid so well and was coming to England. She'd been a nursery governess before that, she told me, which is what any lady might be, I'm sure." Amelia had settled down into a sort of complacent content over her reminiscences; for the moment she seemed strangely oblivious of their meaning to Susan, strangely careless. It was as if she considered that with that cry to the rector she had done and

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

faced the worst, and was now merely putting in interesting details.

"Very genteel she was, and the stories she told me about that woman! And her never coming near her baby, though the father 'd come, many's the time, poor gentleman, while she was gallivanting on deck with other gentlemen, and dressed out like a peacock, and once he said to Mrs. Ridley, 'I wish you were my baby's nurse,' he said, and that made Alice wild, and I don't wonder, for she was a good enough nurse to his baby, and no one could expect a young girl to spend all her time fussing over the child, as Mrs. Ridley did over yours, thinking the world of it, making folks tired the way she'd talk of it, and its beauty, and being different to all other babies that ever were. I declare if that pain in my side isn't coming back; it fairly catches my breath. . . . It's my heart. It's never been the same since he broke it twenty years ago. I was always constant by nature. Alice, she used to laugh at me the way I'd go on about his eyes and his beautiful mustache. She was a rare one for laughing. She laughed so that night we changed their clothes, I had to do it all myself pretty nearly. 'Now we'll see if old Mother Ridley knows her precious baby!' she kept saying, for Mrs. Ridley had had an argument about it with her. Alice said that all young babies were alike, and you only know them by their clothes mostly, unless their hair happened to be a different color, which theirs wasn't, both being a sort of brown, and Mrs. Ridley said she'd know her baby anywhere—which she didn't, after all, poor creature! We were that full of high spirits we meant no harm, and if I could have looked forward and seen how the clothes would lead folks astray I'd never have done it, God knows, and you seeing your

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

own baby's clothes on the baby that wasn't yours—I'd sooner have cut off my right hand than do it, though I will say 'twasn't any suggestion of mine, but all Alice's idea. 'Let's change their clothes, and put them in each other's beds,' she said. 'What a joke it'll be!' And half an hour after we'd done it, there was that crash— Oh, there's that pain coming back—"

"You changed their clothes?"

Susan's voice seemed to come from a long way off.

"Of course we did—it's hurting me—!"

Susan had turned from the window. Her face was distorted with passion; she held out her shaking hands menacingly; her mouth moved, trying to speak the awful words that were surging up into her throat. For the minute she could not move; she stood there, horrible in her anger, with the red light from the west full on her mad face.

Amelia raised herself in the bed, her hand pressed against her heart, her eyes fixed shrinkingly on Susan's face.

"I—I!" she gasped, and ended with an incoherent mutter.

Susan moved suddenly towards her, and with a cry Amelia fell back on her pillow.

Susan's words came now rapid and thick, almost unintelligible. "Curse you!" she cried. "Curse you! All these years—oh, God, you've ruined my life! You've known, and never told me—" She raised her hand to strike, but her arm refused; she held it stiffly drawn up and back, arrested by the white still face on the pillow. She stood staring down, waiting, watching. Then her arm fell slowly to her side, the madness died from her face. She thought Amelia was dead. Even then she could not for-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

give her; she shrank from touching her, she had to force herself to do it. She felt her heart, and found that it was beating, slowly and very faintly. Amelia had fainted; she was not dead. Susan did all that she could. She sent a boy for Dr. Lawson. Afterwards, when the doctor had gone, and Amelia had fallen into a heavy sleep, Susan, leaving the woman procured by Dr. Lawson with her, left the room. Her step was uneven; once she put out her hand, and had to lean against the wall for support. The strain of the immense pressure she had put upon herself for this last hour was telling upon her now. She had not dared to let herself think; she had forced her mind into the present, to Amelia and her needs, with a wrench that had exhausted her.

Now she walked slowly down the passage, and, opening the door of Audrey's room, went in. The quiet and peace of the little room came about her as she entered with a strength that brought an ache into her throat. It lay bathed in cold moonlight; Audrey's bed gleamed white in its corner; the curtains, that had once been Susan's wedding-gown, looked like two sentinel angels. . . .

Susan let her thoughts go; she unloosed the grip in which she had held them. . . .

It swept upon her at last—full understanding. She trembled at the revelation. It came to her, all that Amelia's confession meant to her; utter and entire realization swept upon her. With a choking sob she fell upon her knees beside Audrey's bed. She cried quietly, washing away all the defiance, the suspense, the sorrow of the long years. She said as she had so often said before, "She is mine," but now she knew that it was true. Audrey was her child.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Dr. Lawson told her that Amelia was dying. She lay in a stupor, taking no food; she did not seem to know any one. But Susan could not bear to meet her sick eyes. She fancied there was an appeal in them, an appeal for forgiveness. And she could not forgive her. She tried to do it; she wrestled with herself, prayed that she might be able to do it, but anger, fierce and keen, broke out in her still at the thought of what Amelia had done. She made excuses for her; she told herself that it had been merely a foolish girlish joke which would have had no evil consequences in the ordinary course of events. She went on to remind herself of Amelia's weakness, her timidity. She had come to her, thinking of course that the child rescued as Susan's would be wearing her baby's clothes, and so she had come to tell her that the child was not really hers. She had meant honestly so far. Then when she tried to approach the subject she had seen something in Susan's manner that had made her suspect that Susan knew the baby was not hers, and she had become frightened, and had kept silence.

So Susan reasoned it out, and the reasoning left her cold, untouched with any pity for Amelia. She further told herself that it had been partly her own fault: she said that if she had had sufficient faith in her own instinct, she would never have feared, and so her manner would not have frightened Amelia. But still she could not wipe out the anger from her heart. And Amelia's vague eyes followed her as she moved about the room. They came between Susan and her entire joy in her new knowledge; they embittered the thoughts that otherwise would have been beautiful. Once when she was alone with Amelia she tried to lie to her; she tried to tell her that she for-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

gave her. But she could not do it; she could not cheat a dying woman.

On the evening of the day after her confession, Amelia roused from her stupor. The nurse was down-stairs having her supper. Susan was sitting near the bed, working. Amelia's voice, husky and hesitating, broke in on her tumultuous thoughts:

"Susan?"

Susan dropped her work and leaned over her.

"What is it?"

"You are angry, Susan?"

She spoke like a child; it was evident that she had forgotten what cause for anger Susan had, while the sense of her displeasure remained.

Susan struggled with herself; her lips formed a negative, then she parried the question.

"Can I do anything for you, Amelia?"

Amelia's hand strayed feebly to the limp curls on her brow.

"The—glass," she murmured.

Susan fetched the mirror. She knew that she ought to try to turn Amelia's thoughts into a more appropriate channel, but, with her own thoughts so unchristian, she felt that it would be hypocrisy.

Amelia took the mirror, but could not lift it. Susan raised it, and Amelia looked vaguely at her reflection.

"I always had a fine color," she murmured. "Much admired—Audrey is pale." A gleam of interest awoke in her face; she glanced with more intelligence at Susan. "In the shell box," she said. "I want to send it to Audrey."

Susan fetched a cardboard box, its lid covered with little shells, and laid it on the bed.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

But Amelia's thoughts had wandered away again.

"Audrey is always kind to me," she murmured, plaintively, "though she is a lady and I'm not. My curls are untidy, and the doctor coming. Susan thinks powder is wicked. She is very angry with me."

The poor, blurred eyes sought Susan's face wistfully.

"Here is the box," Susan said.

Amelia fumbled with it; Susan opened it for her.

"For Audrey," Amelia muttered.

Susan looked into the box. It held some dried brown rose-leaves; some curling-pins; a paper packet of toilet powder; a faded old photograph of a smug-faced man with a very large mustache; an old dance programme scrawled over with witty remarks; a long, white silk mitten with a paper pinned to it on which was written: "The other stolen by M. L. D."; a strong scent-sachet; a few poor little trinkets; and a long, pale-blue ribbon sash.

"The sash." Amelia's white lips directed Susan, and Susan took it from the box. Seeing that Amelia still looked unsatisfied, she shook it out till it lay in a shining stream upon the counterpane. Amelia's face brightened.

"For Audrey," she said, and lay looking at it.

Susan was looking at it, too. Suddenly she saw a plump young girl in a white frock and a blue sash, all smiles and blushes, presenting to her a smug young man with a very big mustache. There had never been any sympathy between Susan and Amelia. Susan had never known her till, on going to America, she had gone to see the cousins who had, long ago, left England. Amelia had no father or mother then; she had lived with an uncle and his children, who were all much older than she was.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Susan had thought her vain and very foolish. She had disapproved so strongly of Amelia's coming to England after her faithless lover that she had refused to have anything to do with her on the boat. She knew that Amelia had acted deceitfully in the matter, that she had told her uncle that Susan wished her to go with her. She had been angry with the girl, and had utterly despised her. She had always despised and never pitied. But now, suddenly, as she stood seeing that simpering young girl in the blue sash, the pathos of it came to her. She looked down at Amelia, lying there, old before her time, vacant, mean, with nothing noble about her poor foolish face, and suddenly she forgave her. She bent over her. "Amelia, I am not angry," she said, huskily.

Amelia looked up at her; slowly the tears trickled down her cheeks.

"I—always—was timid. 'Amelia, you're—a—mouse,'—he used to say—"

They were the last words she spoke. She died at dawn the next day, quite quietly, in her sleep.

CHAPTER XL

AUDREY was coming home. That day she was coming. Susan, in her new happiness, had a feeling that somehow she must be able to make Audrey happy, too. It seemed to her impossible just then that any one could be sad. Kneeling before the drawer in her room, she took out the baby garments, handling them with a new gentleness. Their little owner had gone down to the bottom of the cruel sea in Audrey's little chemise and nightgown. Poor little child! Poor mother! Maybe it was because she had lost her baby that she lived such a frivolous life—that unhappy mother, who had been so bereft. There was a new charity in Susan's heart—a large charity that pitied much, and was slow to condemn. From her wide content and thankfulness she looked out upon the world with new eyes.

She was glad she had forgiven Amelia before she died. Poor Amelia! She had carried out all her wishes with regard to the funeral. There remained no faintest feeling of animosity; she had forgiven freely and wholly. As she had looked down upon Amelia's dead face a new understanding of her had seemed to grow within her. Death had been kindly to the poor, ignoble face; it had wiped out the lines of meanness and craft, the lines of weakness. It had given to the insignificant features a great peace that made them almost noble. To Susan

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

had come the gentle thought that here was the Amelia, who might have been had not a man been cruel to her many years ago; the real Amelia, who had been worsted in the fight and had sunk low.

She forgave her the cruel silence of the years: the silence that had made of her life one long fear. A curious pity had taken the place of the old contempt. She wondered how it would have gone with Amelia if she had had a child. She had never wondered about it before. Now the thought softened her heart towards her, so that she was kinder to Amelia's memory than she had been to her in life.

Audrey was coming home.

For the first time since she had held her—a few weeks' old baby—in her arms, she would look upon her with the infinite peace born of the knowledge that she was her own—all her own. A hundred little evidences of the truth of it came to her now. Her courage, her reserve, her bearing beneath trouble were all characteristics of the sturdy yeoman family from which Susan sprang. The other characteristics, over which she had worried with such anguished fighting, she pondered now with tenderness; they were Audrey's own, that was all. There was no bitterness in the thought now. She realized the futility of her former struggle to mold the child into her own and her husband's likeness. With new clearness of insight she mourned her former harshness. She made tender resolutions, indulged in tender imaginings, which was a rare thing for her to do. On the day of Audrey's return she lit a fire in her bedroom. It was with a joy queerly out of proportion to the mere thing itself that she watched the flames dart up the little chimney. Her

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

anxiety lest the chimney should smoke was intense. It was so many years since a fire had been lit in that room—not since the winter when Audrey had been ill with whooping-cough. She remembered her suffering over a bunch of yellow chrysanthemums that the doctor's wife had sent to Audrey. Audrey had loved them so. And all the while she had thought only of how on board she had heard men promising to load Mrs. Hartley-Dent with flowers when she should land, to compensate for their lack now. There had been little jokes about her fondness for decking herself with flowers. . . .

Now Susan had put a vase of winter cherries on the table. There was a sort of glorying in the doing of the little things that once had held such pain. She began to plan a spring garden for Audrey. . . .

Audrey came late that afternoon.

"The journey has given her a headache," Marcia said, before she drove away.

"Mother, I am so glad to be back!"

It was a tired little cry, nature breaking out for a moment beneath Susan's welcome.

Susan had a passing wonder that she could ever have doubted.

Audrey ate none of the good things Susan had prepared for her. She made excuses: the long journey; a late luncheon; her headache.

After tea she sat on the rug before the fire; she said she was very cold. Susan, working in her chair, drew a little closer. Audrey found herself leaning against her mother's knee, her head in her lap. Neither spoke for a long while.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Poor Amelia," Audrey said, softly. "And you were all alone, Mother?"

"Yes."

"You told me so little. Did she suffer much?"

"No. It was very sudden."

Audrey's eyes were full of tears; she was remembering the little acts of kindness Amelia had performed in the past.

"It was her heart?"

"Yes."

They were silent again.

Susan's work lay in her lap; her eyes were bent on the head resting against her knee—the bright head, with the firelight on it. She could glory in its brightness now without bitter thoughts of another head as bright.

The severe little room took on a comfortable aspect in the firelight; the old oak panelling gave back yellow and red reflections. Audrey looked cosey on the rug.

She spoke at last, dreamily:

"I feel as if I'm little again—somehow—after an illness."

Susan's hand went out and smoothed the soft hair.

"Mother, it is nice to be back again."

Presently she lifted her head; she spoke in a different voice:

"Paris is such a beautiful place, Mother, and at night, when it is all alight, it is so wonderful. I think I like the Place de la Concorde the best of all, it—"

"I don't want to hear about it now," Susan said, uncompromisingly.

Audrey dropped her head to her mother's knee with a whimsical little laugh.

"Oh, don't you, Mother? I'm so glad."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

They were silent again then.

"Every one was very kind," Audrey said, softly—"always very kind. But you—why are you so nice to me, Mother?"

"Am I?" Susan said, with an odd sort of shyness. That was all she could utter of the words surging in her throat.

Audrey gave a childish little snuggle closer up to her.

"It's so nice to be back," she said again.

Susan said:

"And never trouble to talk when you don't want to."

They both knew all that her words held. Audrey said:

"You won't think I—that I'm miserable, or—or anything, if I don't?"

Susan was wise. She said, gently: "You try too hard to be cheerful, Audrey. Don't try. Be yourself for a little while—just you and me: be silent when you want to; don't laugh unless you want to; do what you like."

The words were curt, but Audrey drew a long breath of relief.

"Yes, Mother," she said.

CHAPTER XLI

AUDREY paused breathless, and cowered beneath the high hedge. Its bare branches did not afford much shelter. She was exhausted with her fight against the wind. She was so tired of the wind: it seemed to her that it was always windy now. She had not wanted to come out, but it was so feeble to stay in-doors just because the wind was high. She remembered the day when Martin had joined her at the top of the hill, and had scolded her for being out so late. It was odd how all the things that must have happened in all these places—the roads, the lanes, the woods, and fields—during the years before this last one never came into her mind, but only all the Martin things. . . .

She drew back shivering before the approach of the massed clouds. She felt suddenly, with a fear that made her heart beat faster, her own utter insignificance. It appalled her. It filled her with a sense of utter loneliness. She quailed before the spaces of the world. She gazed, afraid, out over the large, cold earth; she saw the gray hills, aloof, holding themselves in an impenetrable, eternal reserve. She heard the wind crying aloud its own everlasting woes in a tongue that she could not read. Nothing had any connection with her. It was all so large, so grand, and cold, and indifferent. And she was so small, of such an appalling insignificance. She was

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

afraid to leave her shelter; she felt as if she could not fight her way back home against the forces of the crying wind.

A little rotund figure ambled into sight on the road, buffeted ludicrously by the wind, walking as a drunken man. She ran at him with a sense of relief. "There is no blue-bottle now," she told herself.

The rector returned her greeting with vague amiability. He could not remember, for the moment, who she was. But she was young and pretty, and she called forth his aged gallantry. He offered his arm with an air, as if it were strong and lusty still.

"The wind is too strong for a young lady to-day," he said.

She took his arm gratefully; she had suddenly a companion in her insignificance. This little old gentleman, with a bundle of tracts emerging from one pocket, and, guiltily, a scarlet corner of a paper-covered novel from another, was surely insignificant, too. Yet he had been the cause, long ago, of a beautiful emotion. He had been the starting-point of a wonderful friendship. She felt a fondness for him for that still. She forgave him innumerable questions as to the intricate relationships existing between various people in the Old Testament. She forgave him her catechism. Because once, long ago, a blue-bottle had buzzed round his dignified head. She propped him now as well as she could, and he asked her if she found his arm helpful. She assured him that she found it exceedingly helpful, and in amity they struggled on in the teeth of the wind. When she laughed he remembered who she was. He began to speak of Amelia.

"You saw her at the last?" she said.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Yes, yes! Her mind was wandering. The sick have queer hallucinations—very queer hallucinations. I am afraid I was not able to comfort her much. I hoped to visit her again before she died," he rambled on, in an undertone, as he had a habit of doing lately.

"She didn't suffer much?" she asked, always being anxious on the point, and having received such bald answers from Susan.

"I think not. The Lord is very merciful, and she put her trust in Him. She spoke a good deal of religion. It was a comfort to her, even though her mind wandered. The sick have very queer hallucinations—very queer, indeed."

"Had Amelia any?"

"Ah, yes, yes! The poor soul was very much worried—very much worried, indeed."

"I wish I had been there."

"You would, I think, have been of no help to the poor soul; very likely an additional trouble—yes, an additional trouble, since her hallucination was connected with you, my dear."

"With me?"

"Yes, yes! She fancied you were not your mother's daughter. Very queer hallucinations the sick have. You are somewhat like Runella, my dear, only she is taller and has more color. But there is a likeness, yes, yes, a certain likeness: the hair is like—the hair certainly is like."

"Who is Runella?" She humored him.

"I don't quite know yet. It is very exciting—very exciting, indeed. I fancy she will prove to be the daughter of the Prince and Princess, or it may be she is the daughter of the old Duke of Ormandeson. She is of high

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

birth; of that I am convinced—quite convinced. Many would not suspect it, since she is obliged to sell violets for a living—the sweet and humble violet. It is very exciting—very exciting, indeed. The wicked Count Tolstoff makes me feel young and valorous again, my dear! I want to be up and fighting her battles—yes, yes, fighting her battles. The young and innocent, thrown upon the world, have an excessively hard battle to fight—an excessively hard battle. But,” with a sudden change of tone, “there is One who always watches over them, One who never slumbers. We must always remember that, my dear.”

Battling with the wind, its roar in her ears, she did not catch all that he said, but she had heard of the nature of Amelia’s dying hallucination, and it set her wondering.

Later she spoke to her mother about it; but the subject was so evidently distasteful that she did not pursue it. She was very anxious to please her mother at this time. Susan, in subtle ways, had altered, and Audrey recognized the change, and was grateful for the little privileges accorded now that before had been withheld.

Susan one day, speaking abruptly, asked her if she would care for her to dress differently.

Audrey looked up pleased.

“Oh yes, Mother!”

“I suppose you would like me in velvet?” Her tone was sarcastic.

“No. Silk—gray silk, Mother—a lavender gray for the evening, made very plainly.”

“And my hair crimped?”

She laughed.

“No; just as it is, only a *little* looser.”

The silk was purchased and made. Susan tried to

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

leave her hair a little looser, but the pretty wave that appeared directly it had the chance savored of extreme foolishness and vanity to her. But Audrey was pleased, so she bore with it. She was pitifully anxious to please her—to bring a brightness to the face that had grown so much too serious for its years.

She invited the little Barringtons to tea. She made all her nicest cakes for their delectation.

Bobbie took an odd fancy to her. She confided in Audrey:

“Bob love your little Ma.”

She refused to call her anything else; she gazed at Susan and sang:

*“There was a little lady,
Such a little Ma!
She kept all her tiny chillun
In a pickle-jar.”*

She found a jar of preserved ginger in a cupboard in the kitchen, and, upsetting it, covered herself with its stickiness. She roared. But her expression of astonishment when Susan curtly and emphatically told her it served her right for meddling was ludicrous. She stopped roaring, and, sucking her finger, eyed Susan reproachfully.

“Bad little Ma! Oh, *awful* bad little Ma! *Poor* old Bob all sticky and mucklymessy.”

She waited expectantly.

“You’ll have to be washed,” Susan said, unsympathetically.

Bobbie stood on her chair and looked pathetic.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"That poor ole Bob's all stuck togedder! Bob's nose is stuck to her mouth, an' her legs won't move, 'cause they're all stuck togedder, an' her ears are stuck togedder, an' her poor little eyes. Oh, that *poor* ole Bob!"

Susan's mouth twisted in an unwilling smile.

Bobbie gave a gleeful chuckle.

"I was on'y lookin' for your little chilluns in the jar. Oh, don't you love ole Bob? Ooh! You goin' to unstick Bob, little Ma?"

She was of course unstuck, and Susan made no objection when loving arms (after being washed) were flung about her neck.

Dickie said earnestly one day to Susan:

"You are *very* lucky to have a kitchen all to yourself, aren't you? Our kitchen has all sorts of people in it."

She had been left, for some reason, down in the kitchen with Susan.

Presently she said, hesitatingly:

"You would be *very* angry if a little girl of yours—if she told a story, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," said Susan, grimly.

Dickie shivered; she stared at her fascinated.

"What would you do to her?" she asked, in a whisper.

"Punish her severely."

"Oh!" said Dickie.

Susan was cutting bread-and-butter; she used a long knife, and the blade began to take on a sinister meaning to Dickie.

"Would you—would you—cut off her tongue?" she asked, but in such a small whisper that this time Susan did not hear her. The blade flashed in the firelight, and Dickie shivered again.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"A lie," said Susan, sternly, "is a wicked and contemptible thing. A person who tells lies is altogether bad."

"I think," said Dickie, in a queer little voice, "I will go up-stairs."

Half-way up the stairs she knelt down, and, clasping her hands, she said:

"Thank God for not giving me Audrey's mother for my mother. Amen."

And that night in bed her arms tightened about Marcia's neck.

"I've never told *one* since that vase that day, Mother," she whispered, excitedly.

"I know, darling. You are my brave little truthful Dickie now."

"Oh, Mother! I—I'm not a person what tells lies, am I?" There was quavering horror in the poor little voice.

"Dear, no! Don't say such horrid things. You are just my truthful Dickie."

Dickie gave a big sigh of relief.

"It's lucky Audrey is a truthful person, else her mother would have cut off her tongue," she said, thoughtfully.

Marcia scolded her, but Dickie would only relent so far as to say:

"I *hope* she wouldn't do it," and her tone signified plainly that she was convinced she would.

When Marcia left her she knelt up in bed, and added a postscript to her prayers:

"Oh, *thank* God for not giving me Audrey's mother for my mother. Thank God again! Amen."

CHAPTER XLII

“**M**ARTIN,” Marcia said, “is in British Columbia.” She stared out of the window at the falling snow. There was a breathless silence. Then: “Is he?” Audrey said, and that was all.

But when Marcia looked at her presently she saw that her face was as white as the snow she had been watching. She said, slowly:

“I heard it from an aunt of his. “I thought you ought to know.”

Again that charged silence.

“Has—has he—”

Her inability to go on made her seem suddenly very young to Marcia, and brought her closer than the determination of all these weeks had done.

“He hasn’t quarrelled with his father,” she said, gently. “I fancy he has gone to look into matters, so that he will be able to lay them clearly before you: to tell you exactly what his prospects would be, and what life you would lead if you were to marry him.”

Euphemïa ate the piece of cake that dropped from Audrey’s trembling fingers.

“Will you tell him not—not to trouble?” she said, stiffly; and then she began to laugh. It struck her that it was such a funny thing to say. She could not stop laughing; she knew that Marcia thought her hysterical, but she could

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

not stop. She tried to tell her why she was laughing, but the words would not come, somehow. And Marcia was making her lie back among the cushions—oh, how funny. And her throat was aching—aching—how she wanted to cry, but she wouldn't—oh, she mustn't! She did not want to laugh any more.

She stood up in a few minutes.

"I will go home now," she said.

"Dear, you are going to stay to dinner and sleep here."

Audrey put up her hand to her forehead.

"I had forgotten. Do you mind if I go home?"

"No, dear, not if you would rather."

"I would, please."

She went up-stairs to put on her hat and coat. When she came down she found the brougham waiting for her.

"I meant to walk. I wish you wouldn't trouble."

Marcia watched her go uneasily.

That drive seemed endless to Audrey. She was very cold, in spite of the rugs. She wanted to get home and up to the little room which was all her own, and where she would be quite alone. She reached the gray cottage and went in. She made her way to the stairs. On her left a door was ajar; she saw Susan sitting before the fire sewing.

She gave a little heart-broken cry: "Mother!"

She cried terribly. . . .

Susan worried her with no questions. After a while she took her up to her room, and helped her to undress. Audrey was quiet now; she looked so ill and worn out that Susan was filled with anxiety, but still she said nothing.

When she was in bed Susan sat down before the fire, and went on with her work. Presently a whisper reached her.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

“Mother.”

She went to the side of the bed. Audrey’s wan little face looked up at her; her eyes were filled with despair.

“I can’t hurt him again! I can’t! What am I to do, Mother?”

“What has happened, Audrey?”

“He is in British Columbia,” her lips trembled, “finding out what it would be like if—if we were married.” Her voice rose a little. “He is still hoping! I shall have to hurt him again—all over again! Mother, I can’t do it! I can’t! To hurt him so—me! I can’t! I can’t!”

Susan spoke gently:

“Then you will marry him, dear?”

Audrey lay suddenly very still.

“No,” she said. “That would hurt him more—afterwards.”

“Perhaps you are wrong,” said Susan, who did not think it.

“No, I am right.”

She turned her face away, and cried into the pillow—cried to think of the pitifulness of his going to British Columbia and still hoping.

The next morning she rose as usual; she acted and spoke as usual, but she looked very ill.

Susan never could think afterwards when the thought came to her. Perhaps dimly, in the long night filled with aching grief for Audrey, it had come to her. She did not know. Only she found herself studying the child’s face with an anxiety that was almost frantic, with a trembling hope that she had magnified Audrey’s sorrow.

But bright words and careful smiles could not deceive her, although in her desperate endeavor to keep that awful

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

thought at bay she made a poor pretence that they did. But her imagination awoke; she saw Audrey happy. And the thought came close, began to lose its vagueness; it said: "You have the power to make her happy."

She pushed it away again; she could not face it. She made pitiful little efforts to please Audrey. Would she like to go away with her? Abroad? Anywhere? Would she like her to ask Mrs. Barrington to let one or two of the children come and stay a week?

After dinner she went up to her room. She locked the door, and took from the drawer the baby garments. She held them in her hands, staring down at them. The thought took shape now; its vagueness had gone. But, oddly, it took shape as affecting other lives—not hers and Audrey's; it was as if she were listening to some one telling her this plan, this idea. Step by step it came to her, and left her cold, an outsider. She worked it out quite clearly. She saw how each piece of the story would fit in. Amelia would have her use; her confession to the rector, as she lay dying, would be of tremendous value. The baby clothes, with the initials worked on them, might not have been sufficient alone. But together with Amelia's statement they would be surely strong enough to convince any one of the truth of her story.

So she reasoned it out.

Then suddenly, with pitiless poignancy, the rôle of outsider fell from her. She stood face to face with the thought born of her love for Audrey. The words of that woman of old, whom once she had dubbed weak and foolish, rang in her ears: "O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." It was curious that the ethical side of the thought never troubled her: she dis-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

missed it with a certain grand curtness—the thing she would do was wicked, and she would do it. That was all. But she did not recognize, in their ugliness and nakedness, the falsehood and deceit that would be necessary. Just as years ago, to save the lives of the young things on her father's farm, she had swerved aside from the path of rigid truth, and had failed to realize it, so now, because the thing which faced her was to be done for Audrey's sake, a curious mental blindness obscured her usually clear vision. She stood there, holding the clothes in her hands, wrestling with herself. But all the while she knew she would do it. Unimaginative as she was, the agony of the sacrifice was so terrible that she found herself looking out onto the snowy world with a vague wonder that all was as it had been yesterday—this morning. The world should have been black, hideous. . . .

Presently her mind, unable yet wholly to face the idea as inevitable, seized exhaustedly on a possible escape. Had she any right to give her child to a selfish, frivolous woman, such as Mrs. Hartley-Dent was? To compel Audrey to call her mother? With a stern inexorability she repeated inwardly the words—"To call her mother." Might not her influence do Audrey harm? So she worked awhile round the new idea, fencing off the sacrifice with what she knew all the while were sophistries. While the one half of her brain was busy with the invention of these excuses, the other said plainly that Audrey would have little to do with Mrs. Hartley-Dent, as she would marry Martin; that she was old enough now not to be harmed by slight contact with selfishness and frivolity; that hers was no weak nature to be so easily affected; that her eventual happiness was the only thing to be considered.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Beneath the window she heard Audrey's voice speak to the servant who had lately come to the cottage. A sudden revolt swept upon her. She would not do this thing. Madly she tore at the flannel petticoat; she would tear it—destroy it—put the doing of this thing out of her power forever! She wrung it in her hands. Then she flung it, unharmed, aside, and fell upon her knees by the bedside.

CHAPTER XLIII

HILARY JOCELYN had felt uncomfortable on receiving the name of his visitor. Now, facing her, he felt wretched and, consequently, very angry. For there was tragedy in this little woman's strong face, and he thought she had come to plead for his relenting.

He said, curtly:

"I am very sorry you should have come. It can do no good."

"I have come because I have something I must tell you," Susan replied, in an expressionless voice.

He looked surprised.

"I know no words of mine nor of any one could make you relent. You have sworn."

She paused.

"Yes," he said.

"You swore that your son should not marry John Fielding's daughter?"

"I did."

She said, in a tired voice, with a mechanical note in it, as if she had said the words many times:

"Audrey is not John Fielding's daughter."

"Good God!"

He stood staring down at her, quite at a loss.

"She is not his daughter, or mine," she repeated, a curious introspective expression in her eyes, as if she were

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

listening to the sound of the words. "Our daughter was drowned when she was a baby."

She paused and moistened her lips.

He said, conveying his doubt as gently as he could:

"Need you tell me the story? It only gives you needless pain."

"It isn't needless," she answered. "If it were needless, should I be doing it? I've got to do it." She paused again. For a moment she turned from the idea, sick loathing upon her.

"I think I would sooner see her dead than do it!" she cried, in a low voice that shook with the tragedy of her revolt. There was no acting about it, but it did much to convince him that she was speaking the truth; she could have found no surer way to make him believe her story. As she went on speaking a chivalrous pity for her awoke in him. Astounding as her tale was, he found himself believing every word.

She told her story in a dull, monotonous voice, devoid of all comments and side issues.

"She was drowned twenty years ago. We were coming home from New York—the *Victoria*—"

He nodded.

"I remember her going down."

"My husband was drowned, too. In trying to get to my baby I was pushed down; I hit my head, and was knocked senseless. They put me in a boat. We reached Ballyincragh, in Ireland. I was very ill for three months—unconscious all the while. Then they brought my baby to me. At first I only thought she had altered through growing much fatter and bigger. Some weeks later the Irish girl who had been looking after her brought me the

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

clothes she had been wearing when rescued. They weren't her clothes. They had thought, because she was in the same boat as myself and my nurse, that she was my child. They never questioned it. The clothes were marked 'B. M. H.-D.'" Her hand closed convulsively upon the parcel in her lap. The tremendous strain she was putting upon herself was only apparent in that grasp and in the sudden loss of voice.

"Then who—" he began, in a bewildered way.

"She is Mrs. Hartley-Dent's child."

"Good Heavens!"

He rubbed up his gray hair in perplexity.

"Mrs. Hartley-Dent! But—why—Mrs. *Hartley-Dent*! How did it happen, then? I remember her husband and baby went down with the *Victoria*. Yes, yes! How did she come to make such a mistake? Why did she take it for granted it was her child who was drowned? A woman wouldn't do a thing like that."

Bitter jealousy was in face and voice as she answered:

"She never cared for her baby. She took no notice of her on board. Her nurse was drowned, too, and her husband. The bodies were never recovered. I suppose she believed what was said in the papers. She was ill, too, for some weeks, from the shock."

"It sounds incredible," he said, walking up and down the room. She watched him, and the jealousy, the revolt were swept from her face; a look of fear took their place. She forgot herself absolutely; she only thought that if he would not believe her story she would have to acquiesce in the spoiling of Audrey's young life. She dragged forth her last piece of proof. "My cousin Amelia was on board, too. She knew. When she was

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

dying she told Mr. Southey, the rector, that Audrey was not my child. I made him believe that she was delirious. She wasn't."

He glanced at her quickly; there was a curious eagerness in his expression.

"She told him that?" he said, ruminatingly.

There was relief in his voice. He wanted to believe her story; with all his heart and soul he wanted to believe it. And here surely was proof—ordinary, worldly, solid proof; not merely the proof of a woman's expression—of her agony. He was a simple old gentleman who had an erroneous idea that he was shrewd and astute. His natural instinct had been to believe her story; but the cultivated idea of his astuteness had led him at last to doubt, or to tell himself that he doubted. His very eagerness to credit her truth made him uneasy. But here was proof. He could consult that rector.

She saw his change of opinion; and realizing that victory was hers, she seemed suddenly to fall together, as it were. She sat, huddled up, her hands limp.

"Here are the clothes," she said.

He took the parcel in silence, cut through the string, and stood looking down upon the little chemise, and the folded petticoat, and the nightgown.

Then he looked at her.

"Why didn't you destroy them all these years?"

It was a man's question, and she could not explain.

"I don't know," she said, dully.

"You would never have told the truth but for—er—"

"No," she said, in his pause.

Then she said:

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"I have done it because she loves your son. You will not come between them any more?"

Absurdly, illogically, seeing that the woman before him had been guilty of fraud, of theft, he felt that he was a brute.

"No," he said, curtly.

She gave a great sigh, and rose.

"Er—is she at all like Mrs. Hartley-Dent?" he asked.

He was thinking of his son; he disliked Mrs. Hartley-Dent.

"No," she said. She added, fiercely: "Not at all!"

He nodded.

"Will you sit down again? There are a few questions I want to ask you."

She sat down with a weary patience.

He stood lost in thought. She knew that he was thinking of his son. A bitter hatred of him grew up in her heart. It was his doing—all the doing of one obstinate old man! She saw the happiness in his face, and her jealousy flamed. She put up her hand to her mouth, as if she needed to shut back the mad words that rose to her lips: "It is a lie! She is mine!" She almost cried it out. Then the mood passed, and her patience returned.

But it had left her a little more worn out, a little tired, a little less capable of clear thought.

She found herself thinking of Hilary Jocelyn as the wise king of old; only this time, when the woman had cried out, "Give her the living child," he had done it. His wisdom had failed. He had not understood this time. . . . And she was the woman. . . . She woke from the tired stupor that had stolen upon her, woke to fresh pain. She looked upon him with a vague contempt. They had been wiser

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

of old. She wondered that he had been so ready to believe her.

She did not realize that the fact of the story she had told him having been, for twenty years, the truth to her—the dreaded truth, pushed from her, fought with, doubted, but always there—had given her recital of it a strong reality.

As she left him she was thinking vaguely that Solomon was not so wise as he had been painted. She had cried to him, "Give her the living child."

And he had done it.

CHAPTER XLIV

“AUDREY, I have something to tell you.”
The words dragged themselves out.

Susan was facing the worse part of her tremendous self-sacrifice now. She faced, knowingly, the possibility of Audrey's despisal, her repudiation. And she faced the certainty of her joy.

She had pondered, these last days, the strong purity of her child's nature, the absolute truth of it, the conscientiousness. All these things her up-bringing had fostered, had strengthened. And now she was to sit in judgment on her mother. She was to be told of deceit practised through the long years, of falsehood, of theft. Susan put it plainly to herself. She ended always with the thought of the child's ultimate great happiness. A certain amount of suffering upon learning the nature of the woman she had thought her mother; then supreme joy. Sometimes the memory of her wild determination never to give her up, when she had thought she was not her child, crossed her mind, and she wondered. Somehow it was different now. That woman in the Bible was always in her mind—“O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it.”

She was giving her child to the other woman—the foolish, worthless woman who would not know how to prize the gift. Grim imaginings of Mrs. Hartley-Dent assailed her.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

She saw her making a joke of it, saying, with her frivolous laugh: "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it."

"Audrey, I have something to tell you."

"What is it, Mother?"

It was late in the evening, after supper. Susan had returned from her long journey only an hour before.

"Need you tell me to-night, Mother? You look so tired."

"Yes, I must tell you to-night. Sit there—on the rug—child. Don't interrupt. Let me tell you in my own way."

"Yes, Mother."

Audrey was afraid. She sat very still, looking into the fire. She knew not to look into her mother's face.

Susan began to tell her. Her tongue felt oddly heavy and tired; it required a great effort to get the words said. Audrey took her hand between hers, and held it. In Susan's mind, behind what she was saying, a thought came: "When would she drop that hand in horror?"

She said it all. Audrey's face was snow-white. She clung to her mother's hand. When Susan stopped, she turned and flung her arms about her.

"Mother—Mother—oh, it isn't true! Mother! You are my mother—"

Susan began to tremble. It was not what she had expected. She was not prepared. This was not repudiation, nor was it joy. The arms clung to her. "You are my mother—"

Then she said:

"The long falsehood—the deceit!" She said it tremblingly.

"I was yours! You were mine, Mother. It seemed so. Ah, why have you told me now? I don't want to know.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Mrs. Hartley-Dent is not my mother. I only want you—not her.”

It was Susan's moment.

Whatever might come afterwards, she would have had that moment. She was repaid. A peacefulness dawned in her haggard face. She prolonged the moment jealously; she lived every bit of it, clung to it; not just yet could she give it up. So she kept silence. She watched hungrily Audrey's face, read the love in it, saw its truth and loyalty.

“Mother, can't we pretend? Can't we forget that you have told me? It is so strange—it doesn't seem real to me. And she doesn't want me. And you do. You do want me, Mother, don't you?”

“Yes, Audrey.”

“Mother, there is some mistake. I feel it, I *know* it! Those clothes were washed up—they weren't on me. That girl made a mistake. You would have known, Mother, if I hadn't been your baby—”

One by one Susan recognized the old weary arguments of her use; but now, in the young, eager voice, they sounded fresh, new, convincing.

“Yes; it's all a mistake, Mother.”

Suddenly Susan awoke to a new danger. She must convince her before she reminded her of Martin.

“Amelia knew,” she said.

“Yes, you told me. Mr. Southey told me, too. How did she, Mother? How could she?”

Susan's lips moved stiffly.

“She had seen more of my baby than I had. I had been so ill ever since she was born. And on board she had been friends with Mrs. Hartley-Dent's nurse. She knew her baby—you—too. Audrey, you must believe it.”

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Then I don't belong to you at all? Oh, Mother! Mother! why did you tell me?"

Susan did not reply at once. Audrey's face was upturned, her wet eyes looking at her in puzzled misery.

Susan knew that the end of her moment had come.

"Can't you guess why I have told you?" she said, gently. "Audrey, I have been to Mr. Jocelyn to-day. He knows."

Audrey began to tremble. She dropped her head to Susan's knee. She knew now why she had done it.

There was a long silence; from the hall there came to them the tick-tack of the wheezy old clock. Susan found herself listening for the little asthmatical cough it always gave every five minutes. When it came she spoke.

"You won't have to hurt him any more," she said.

"Mother!"

In a burst Audrey's tears came.

Susan stroked her hair gently.

Audrey looked up through her tears. There was passionate love in her face.

"Mother, you did it for us! Oh, if I could tell you what I think of you!"

"But the falsehood—" Susan said, wonderingly.

"Ah, what does it matter, Mother? They had given me to you—saved me from the sea for you! I was yours! How could you give up your little baby? But you have—you have done it now! Mother, I am more yours than I've ever been before! You are my mother!"

Susan listened. Audrey's joy was there now, but the hurt of it had been taken away. For the minute her loneliness was lulled; she forgot that she had given her child to the other woman.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"Mother," Audrey said, shyly, "if I write a letter, can it be posted to-night?"

"But there is no post out till ten o'clock in the morning."

"But there—there *might* be. It—*might* make a difference."

"Very well," Susan said.

CHAPTER XLV

MRS. HARTLEY-DENT was considerably upset. Her maid announced to her friends that she was suffering from an attack of influenza, and could see no one. Her friends did not believe it, and set about trying to discover the reason of her sudden seclusion. But none of them arrived near the truth, which had almost a sensational flavor about it, and was not in the least like the suggestions and innuendoes in which they indulged when other topics flagged. Mrs. Pat was so upset that she gave no thought at all to her friends: the excuse of influenza was evolved entirely by Lucille, who had an innate sense of propriety that had proved, more than once, useful to her mistress, who was inclined to be swayed entirely by the mood of the moment, regardless of all future moments. She had refused to believe the story Hilary Jocelyn had told her. She had been bitterly witty at his expense; had wondered amusedly at his credulity. She had assured him that she knew many mothers who would do as much for their daughters as Susan had done for hers to secure such an extremely desirable husband as Martin.

"Women are all supposed to be good at fibbing," she smiled. "But mother-fibbing—it beats them all!"

She had eased some considerable doubts on his part by declaring that although Audrey was a dear little thing, they had less than nothing in common.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Hilary Jocelyn, looking at her, was very glad to hear it. She further reassured him by showing him a photograph in which she and Audrey both appeared. It had been taken at the Hall by Jimmy. It was not a particularly successful photograph: some of the group had two heads; but both Audrey and Mrs. Pat, side by side, had come out clearly. Audrey was exceedingly serious—the result of pity for Jimmy's anguished remonstrance against the sitters' frivolity; she was looking straight into the camera. Hilary Jocelyn studied the small grave face very earnestly; he noted the breadth of the brow, the shy honesty of the eyes which was so characteristic of her, and he drew a deep breath of satisfaction.

"Now, isn't it ridiculous! Is there the faintest resemblance between us?" Mrs. Pat demanded, petulantly.

He glanced from the photograph to her.

"No," he said, heartily, "not the faintest!" And he very nearly added: "Thank God!"

Perhaps she felt the words hovering in the air; her color deepened a little.

"Of course," she drawled, "it's convenient for you to believe this trumped-up story."

"Most," he agreed.

"You can be reconciled to your son and retain your pride at the same time."

"Exactly," he said, courteously.

"But, you see," she proceeded, spitefully, "I gain nothing and lose a good deal. I have not the slightest wish to be suddenly saddled with a grown-up daughter. The idea"—she glanced into a mirror—"is absurd!"

He said gallantly (he felt far more charitably disposed towards her since he had seen the photograph):

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"You do render the situation a little ridiculous."

"Well, I shall do my best to prove the story a lie," she said.

That was before she had seen her solicitor on the matter. He, after due inquiries, strongly advised her to accept the situation. He explained that further inquiries would be probably, almost certainly, productive of the same result. Then he hinted delicately at the expense of such inquiries, and his expression was not so delicate as his words. It said quite plainly that until Mrs. Hartley-Dent had settled the little matter already existing between them, he must decline to undertake further investigations. It also suggested that in any case he was not anxious to start a long and arduous inquiry for this particularly troublesome and unremunerative client, who was tolerated by him only on sentimental grounds, because her father had been his dearest friend.

Mrs. Pat was very angry. But for once she did not give rein to her anger. She dismissed her solicitor, and thought. She decided finally that the less publicity given to the matter the better for her. There was a certain Colonel Jackson to be considered—in fact, she had been considering him all the while. She feared the effect her sudden possession of a grown-up daughter might have upon his tactics. At the present moment, after much and long reconnoitring, he was attacking; Audrey might rout him; he might retire. Colonel Jackson had lately come into a fortune; he also suffered from hereditary gout and an execrable temper.

But Mrs. Pat was a brave woman, and she was filled with a weary loathing of the task of striving to make both ends meet—a task for which she was constitutionally unfitted.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

In the end she wrote to Audrey, suggesting that she should come and see her.

In the midst of her selfishness she had, as she addressed the envelope, a flash of insight.

"I should make a perfectly horrid mother. Nature made a mistake when she sent me a baby!"

CHAPTER XLVI

AUDREY, still as Audrey Fielding, came to Mrs. Pat's flat in town. She felt horribly nervous as she ascended the stairs. She found Mrs. Pat, worried and sallow, lying on a lounge, smoking. She came in, shut the door behind her, and stood hesitating. They eyed each other with a curious glance; there was hostility in it, and a certain awkwardness. The situation was unusual, and it bristled with latent dramatic possibilities which both, from different reasons, dreaded.

Mrs. Pat said, with a short laugh:

"You needn't kiss me."

Audrey reddened. It was a point on which she had debated long and nervously.

"Sit down."

She sat down. She could think of nothing to say.

"I warn you at once that I'm in a vile temper. You can tell that by my complexion. Ask Lucille. What a skin you have, child! You never got that from me, at any rate."

She eyed her enviously; she was thinking that her fresh youth would age her as surely as possession of a grown-up daughter must, in any case, age her.

"My hair is from you," Audrey said, trying to smile.

"Your hair? Rubbish! Don't be such a baby. My hair is a dark brown naturally, only I decided years ago

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

that auburn would be more suitable. Haven't you noticed that some of the red has gone out of it since first you saw me? I preferred your color. I told Lucille to study yours. She makes up my dye. I called you into my room one day at the Hall to let her study it. I think it's pretty good now. It made mine look just a little bizarre."

She was talking to gain time.

She actually found herself at a loss, face to face with this newly discovered, grave-eyed little daughter. Audrey's seriousness disconcerted her. She was convinced—dismayingly convinced—that she would have ideas on the subject of daughter and motherhood. She was sure that she would see, with her clear young gaze, through all the pretty speeches which she had concocted, and in which she intended to gently convey two or three unpalatable facts.

"You have grown thinner," she said, abruptly.

She stared unmercifully at the blush which overspread Audrey's face.

"I wish I could blush like that," she said, carelessly. "What are you doing it for, child?"

"I—I don't know. This room is rather hot."

"Is that all the answer you have ready? Fling me that box of matches, will you? Now, let us talk it all out clearly. To begin with, I understand that your up-bringing has been strict and old-fashioned. It's a pity. That sort of thing has gone out. I do hope you are not filled with milk-and-water platitudes as to a daughter's duty towards her mother, and all that sort of thing."

Audrey, to her horror, felt herself growing hot and red again; it was as if all the poor little conscientious resolves she had been making lately had been dragged ruthlessly forth into the light of day to be examined and mocked at.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Mrs. Pat did not see this blush; she was busy lighting a fresh cigarette.

"Nowadays," she resumed, "mothers are so young that they're either comrades or rivals of their daughters. They're never that sort of peculiar compound they were supposed once to be—teacher, sympathizer, angel, and so forth. They're human. I'm human. So are you. I don't feel in the least that I want to take you to my heart any more than you feel that you want to take me to yours. The whole position is absurd and theatrical—and horribly hard on me. Your sudden existence will give all the cats in my set a glorious opportunity to exercise their spite. You add a dozen years to my age."

Audrey, looking bewilderedly at her, thought that she really looked as if the dozen years had been added. She remembered her amazement that she could have so young a mother. Now Mrs. Pat did not look nearly so young. And she had grown so plain! Vaguely she supposed it was because she was not powdered. She did not understand that the elaborate system of make-up and toilette had been dropped as unnecessary for a daughter's eyes. Nor could she know that Mrs. Pat, in spite of her common-sense, chafed beneath the young eyes that saw her at last as she really was. Mrs. Pat was angry now with herself that she had not put herself into Lucille's hands before admitting Audrey, and she was angry with herself for experiencing such an absurd sensation. All of which added to the tiresomeness of the situation, and helped to sharpen her tongue.

Audrey, sitting there so quietly, was dismayed at the sense of antagonism which she experienced; every minute her hostility grew. She found herself longing to return

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

sharp answers; she felt most intensely irritated. She did not know that her attitude of mind was caused chiefly by a deep mental partisanship of Susan. She was bristling inwardly on Susan's behalf, waiting for a word against her. She was Susan's daughter; it was a natural instinct, and it had its complement just as naturally in a shrinking from the new mother thrust upon her. Her coldness illogically incensed Mrs. Pat. She said, sharply:

"Why don't you say something? Did you expect me to welcome you with open arms?"

"I don't see why you should," she answered, seriously.

"I'm glad of that," sarcastically. "Apparently you don't feel any particular stirring of affection yourself."

Audrey was distressed.

"It—is so soon yet," she said.

Mrs. Pat laughed.

"Please don't trouble to make excuses. I'm glad you are so sensible. It makes it a little less difficult for me. I know sentimentalists hold that the tie between a mother and child is something mysterious and wonderful and independent of circumstances. But, you see, we prove the contrary. Had I always had you I suppose I should feel differently towards you—at least, I should be used to you. Really that woman should be punished! If it were not for the tiresome publicity and the money, I would see that she was punished. She—"

"You mustn't say anything against her," Audrey put in, quite quietly. But her eyes had grown suddenly very angry.

Mrs. Pat was amused.

"So there's a suspicion of a bad temper hidden beneath that softness? Well, the woman doesn't interest me. I should not believe her story at all if it were not for that

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

cousin's dying confession. Dying people are really the most selfish in the world: they never think of anything but their own puny souls. So long as they can cleanse them, they do not care what havoc they leave behind them! What lives they ruin! What skeletons they drag out of the family cupboard!" Suddenly she shrugged her shoulders. "All this is beside the point." Then she talked.

Audrey gathered a good deal from that talk. At first she essayed a tentative effort to get on a better footing with her new mother by proffering a shy sympathy when Colonel Jackson was brought into the conversation.

But Mrs. Pat's stare, her obvious amusement, sent the sympathy, hot and abashed, back upon itself. After that she sat quiet and listened.

Mrs. Pat wrapped her unpalatable facts in a certain amiable vagueness, but she had the uncomfortable conviction throughout her talk that Audrey was being distinctly shocked. She grew angry, and indulged in more reckless talk—exaggerated, smart, not meaning half what she said.

Audrey said, in a pause:

"Why did you tell me to come?"

"I thought it better to talk things over. There is such a middle-class crudity about writing; there can be no suggestions."

Audrey rose.

"I will go," she said.

Mrs. Pat was surprised, and a little ashamed of herself.

"I'm not always so horrid," she said. "And we haven't settled about your marriage yet. I suppose you ought to be married from my house—"

Audrey put in a strenuous "No!" She added: "You will have nothing to do with it."

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

Mrs. Pat reddened a little.

"You are very rude," she said.

"You have been rude to me, too," Audrey replied, gravely, "but I am sorry."

Mrs. Pat found herself making excuses.

"We have nothing in common. It is not my fault. All these years we have grown apart. I should shock you all day long." She paused, recognizing the futility of the excuses, and rather amused at herself for essaying them. But she really began to feel quite a lack of animosity to this daughter of hers, who was displaying such unexpected common-sense. "You do understand, don't you?" she said, suddenly.

"Yes," Audrey said. "You want me to go, and never come back."

"Good gracious! What a hateful way of putting it! You have horrible manners, child! I shall be quite glad to see more of you later on. Just now your presence would be inconvenient, that's all."

"Yes," Audrey said. "Good-bye."

CHAPTER XLVII

UP in the nursery at the Hall, Audrey sat and worked. In and out went the needle. "I must hurry," she said to Bobbie, who lay asleep on the rug before the fire—"I must hurry." She knew that Bobbie was asleep, but she could not help saying it; she loved the sound of every syllable—"I must hurry," she said.

Euphemia, curled up with Bobbie and the nursery cat, cast a liquid glance at her, then curled tighter and went to sleep. Audrey's hands lay among the soft white-and-green stuff. . . . In two days he *might* come—in two little, long, short, interminable days! And she would never hurt him any more. All her life she would try to make up for the way she had hurt him.

She rose restlessly, and went to the window. The short afternoon was closing in; the ground was powdered lightly with snow—the world had grown so beautiful again! When Martin came she would climb that hill again in a wind that roared and blew. . . .

When Martin came. . . . She must hurry. He had said once that he loved her in white. Would he think the white-and-green blouse pretty?

In and out went the needle; she must make the tiny rosettes for the yoke—he had noticed them once on another blouse of hers, and had laughed at them. Martin

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

laughed so nicely; he looked at you while he laughed as if he—he liked you very much.

She rose again, and went to a mirror hanging on the wall. She was afraid she had grown ugly. What would he think of her? Anxiously she scanned her reflection, putting up the white-and-green stuff to her face. Then she gave a little soft laugh. What did it matter, after all? Her eyes strayed to the quiet old hills; she held out her arms with a childish gesture: "Dear, old, friendly hills! You are always watching—and you are glad Martin is coming back. We will come out to you—into your beautiful gray mist—Martin and I—" Her breath caught with the last words; she hid her face in her hands. It was so wonderful. . . .

In and out went her needle; she was sewing on the little rosettes now. The firelight was so beautiful; she remembered how she had watched it shine, one evening, on Martin's head. And once he had laughed, and said that she had only just missed having a little red head. . . .

Suddenly her thoughts went out to Susan. She remembered how, the evening before, her mother had sat looking into the fire. She had seemed suddenly so little and worn and sad. Audrey had gone to her with tears in her eyes. . . . Susan had told her that she must not call her mother any more.

Audrey's mouth closed with sudden firmness; her face grew stern. She would never call Mrs. Hartley-Dent mother. Susan was her mother. She refused absolutely to look upon Mrs. Pat as her parent.

She had suffered a good deal after Susan's revelation to her of her parentage. She had rebelled strenuously against the idea. Then, with her natural conscientious-

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

ness, she had forced herself into making good resolutions.

She had fought against the curious feeling of hostility that, on hearing Susan's story, had grown up in her against Mrs. Pat. She thought the position out very earnestly, but she could find no responsive chord within her, so far as Mrs. Pat was concerned. She went to Susan much troubled.

"Mother, I am your child. I feel it. I can't make myself look upon Mrs. Pat as my mother. Must I try?"

"Yes," Susan said.

She added slowly, as if against her will, and as if she must know:

"I don't understand your attitude towards me, Audrey. Don't you realize the wickedness of what I did?"

Audrey winced.

"Don't say it, Mother!"

She tried earnestly to explain, but she could not. She could only reiterate:

"I don't feel like that about it, Mother. I feel—oh, I am all in sympathy with you."

Susan knew that it was because she was her daughter. It seemed to her—now when she had no further need of proof—that every day, every hour, brought to her evidence of Audrey's true parentage. It struck her vaguely as being very cruel.

Audrey went on trying to do what was right. She made many resolutions; she would try to love her new mother; she would live with her if she wished it, only she must come and stay for months with Susan. She put one slight memory vigorously aside, and that was the misleading remark Mrs. Pat had once made about her

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

age. To Audrey it was a falsehood, and she tried not to think of it.

But after her interview with Mrs. Pat her attitude had completely changed. She had returned home looking stern and pale.

"She doesn't want me, and I don't want her, Mother."

Later, after much thought, she had said:

"I cannot help it if she is my mother. She isn't like a mother. If she had brought me up she would still never have loved me. I feel it. You have done everything for me. When I am with you I feel all restful and good. When I was with her I felt bad, I felt all prickly and rubbed up the wrong way. I am not going to try and feel like her daughter any more." She was quite firm and decided about it. Her usual strong sense of duty seemed perverted; nothing could shake her determination.

Three little rosettes were made and sewn on; she studied the effect with her head on one side. Once Martin had taken her hand in his, and had marvelled at the cleverness of her fingers. . . .

*"Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves,
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves,"*

sang Bobbie, drowsily.

Audrey put down her work, and ran at her.

"Oh, Bobbie! Oh, Bobbie!" She hugged her.

"Poor ole Bob's got five cattlepillers an' twelve spiders an' ninety hundred flies all crawlin' 'bout in her foot," said Bobbie, pathetically.

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

"It has gone to sleep. I'll rub it, darling."

She took off Bobbie's shoe and sock, and rubbed her foot between her hands.

"Bobbie, what do you do when you're so happy that—that—"

"You bust," prompted Bobbie.

She laughed.

"No one in all the world has ever felt as I'm feeling now. No one could, because there isn't another Martin anywhere, and there never has been! That's logic. Oh, Bobbie, there are heaps of poor people who think they're quite happy, and they don't know what it means! Not an atom! Because they haven't got Martin, you see. And I have! I have, Bobbie! I don't deserve him, but I have him!"

"Martin's comin'," Bobbie said, drowsily.

"Yes. Martin's coming! Martin's coming. Suppose—"

She knelt there, a sudden awful realization upon her of what it would mean if Martin were not coming. . . . How had she lived through those days when she had thought he would never come again?

"Say it again, Bobbie! Say it again!"

She seized Bobbie's fat shoulder and shook her, a sudden unreasonable fear upon her.

"Say it again, Bobbie!"

Bobbie did not open her eyes. An indignant murmur came from her lips:

"You awful naughty—to—to 'noy—poor ole—Bob!"

Audrey knelt on the rug, the ruddy firelight gleaming on her head. She hid her face in her hands. Suppose his boat was wrecked? It was a thought that had come

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

to her often lately. Once a boat had gone down, and her father had been drowned. . . .

“Bobbie, say it again! Say that he is coming!”

Bobbie was fast asleep.

The door handle was turned, the door opened. Martin stood there.

She stared at him, trembling; she whispered then: “You—needn’t say it now, Bobbie.”

“Little red head!” Martin said, with a queer laugh.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE sun had set, and the world lay now in a wonderful green-gray light. In the west there were still a few pink clouds that every moment grew paler.

Susan sat at her window, her face luminous in the weird glow; her hands lay idle in her lap. There was a subtle change about her; some of the rigid erectness of her stiff little figure had gone, her shoulders were a little bent. In the beautiful, ghostly light her face shone patient; there was a peace in it. She looked as a woman looks who has come through great trouble and sickness, and in the end found convalescence, but not the full measure of the health and strength that were hers before the illness. Something Susan had lost which she would never regain, and the struggle of the manner of that losing had left traces that would never be obliterated. But she did not regret—she had never once regretted the way she had acted. Only she felt older than she had before; some of her hard energy had left her. And the world had grown somewhat empty.

Sitting there, alone, in the deepening dusk, she looked a pathetic figure. The strong light accentuated the lines and wrinkles in her face that should not have been there: it showed up the thinness of her figure; it made her loneliness poignantly apparent.

She was resting. It did not strike her as strange that she should be doing that: she did not pause to remember

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

that, a few months ago, it had been a thing quite alien to her. In those days she had never rested, except at night, in her bed. Now she had been preparing for Audrey's visit. She would not allow the country girl who acted as maid to do the tiniest thing in preparation for this homecoming of Audrey's. She was coming to stay awhile, and Martin was coming, too.

Everything was ready. In two hours they would be here. Her hands trembled suddenly in her lap. In two hours she would know if her sacrifice had been worth while. One glance at Audrey's face, one sound of her voice, would tell her more than all the happy letters she had received.

She was glad the pale crocuses which she had set last autumn had come up. Audrey loved flowers. She had heard, with a grim sense of amusement, Martin comment on the fact as an instinct inherited from Mrs. Hartley-Dent. She had thought that once. Her heart ached suddenly over the memory of her harsh dealing with the instinct through the years of Audrey's childhood. Now she would have strewn her path with flowers, but it was too late. The crocuses were there—pale, tearful, sad little ghosts in the twilight, their beauty beaten out of them by the rain that had fallen that afternoon. Still, she was glad they were there. She leaned from the open window to look at them. The scent of wet mould came strongly up to her, the green light was fading from the sky, the pink clouds had grown cold and gray. For a minute she was unconsciously and unusually affected by the intolerable sadness of the dying world. She was affected more easily lately by outside things than she had been wont to be. It was as if her fight had weakened the grim armor

THE GREATER MISCHIEF

of beauty-blindness with which she had girded herself about.

Leaning from the window, she heard the sound of approaching hoof-beats, of wheels. She caught at the sill, and stood listening. She could not see the road from her room; she told herself that it was some passing farmer. . . . Could they have caught the earlier train? It was not an express. But could Audrey have been impatient to get to her? She stood, a little gray figure in the twilight, waiting. She heard the wheels stop. The farmer had met a friend outside her gate. . . .

She turned from the window and went to the door. She stood listening, her head close to the opening.

"Mother!"

It rang up the stairs—a joyous young voice.

Susan caught at the handle to turn it. She knew now that her sacrifice had been worth while. Her odd little face puckered suddenly with a curious smile.

"I told her she wasn't to call me that!"

She turned the handle clumsily.

"Mother! Where are you, Mother?"

It was nearer now. Audrey was running up the stairs.

"Mother!"

THE END

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